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Food Systems Planning in Austin/Travis County: The Role of Farmers

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Food Systems Planning in Austin/Travis County: The Role of Farmers

by

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Abstract

Food Systems Planning in Austin/Travis County: The Role of Farmers

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The presence of food systems in the realm of planning has gained considerable recognition over the years. Healthy food access, urban agriculture, and sustainable agricultural practices seem to be of particular interest as these topics relate to other planning issues such as public health, placemaking, and resilience. Throughout this increase of interest by both citizens (consumers/producers) and researchers the majority of attention has been on how food systems affect cities and on those food injustices everso present in today's world. I make the argument however, that if we hope to support prolonged growth and strength in our food systems (plans) we must also focus attention on the assumptions, worries, and needs of supply-side food systems stakeholders/actors such as farmers and farmworkers. I propose here, the need to consider farmer perspectives in the creation of an equitable local food system. With the pressure of urban growth in Austin's eastern rural-urban fringe, intervention will be necessary if we hope to

preserve the prime farmland found there. Following theories of communicative planning, a comprehensive review of related literature and Austin/Travis County food policy documents will be compared against feedback from stakeholder interviews. This comparison will show how effective Austin/Travis County have been in achieving the sustainable food system they describe in their documents. I believe that farmers will provide valuable information on agricultural land use needs that has not yet been fully considered by Austin/Travis County in their work toward a more equitable food system.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

The presence of food systems in the realm of planning has gained considerable recognition over the years and is now part of many planning initiatives around the world (Weissman & Potteiger, 2018). Farmland preservation seemed to be one of the earlier manifestations of food systems planning in practice, followed by more consumer-side issues such as healthy food access, education, food assistance programs, and urban agriculture (APA 1999, 2007). The latter movement in food systems planning seems to be of particular interest to the City of Austin and Travis County in their work toward a "sustainable food system," though they do have a working group on farmland preservation (ATCFPB, 2009-2018). I make the argument, however, that if we hope to support prolonged growth and equity in our food system, we must also focus attention on the assumptions, worries, and needs of supply-side food systems stakeholders/actors such as farmers and farmworkers. I propose here the need to consider diverse stakeholder needs in the creation of an equitable food system in Austin/Travis County (A/TC) and, specifically, the needs of farmers. This is in response to principles of communicative planning, which show that:

> planning...has to be seen exactly as constituted by many different interests and intentions and thus cannot be seen as initially predictable, but as an unknown

> goal, which is crystallized in the process and realized to a varying and unpredictable degree
>
> (Elling, 2017, 231)

This is especially crucial in emerging food system planning such as that in A/TC because of the assumptions that might be made about the desired outcomes of planning initiatives. Furthermore, Elling (2017) shows that there are four main groups that are involved in the communicative planning: Administrators, Citizens, Investors, and Experts, where experts represent those "...who possess knowledge and experience within the field in question and who function as advisors to any one of the three previous groups of actors…" (232). This last group, experts, is where farms reside in food systems planning. Thus, they should be approached often and meaningfully so that food systems planning initiatives can reach their most ideal state.

Austin is growing quickly; lands to the east where property values are low and land is readily available appear to be the most appealing to future development. It will be important in the coming years to understand area famer perspectives on the effects of prospective growth on agricultural land access, farming viability, and other identified variables. It will also be important to understand the value of farmer/farmworker contributions to food systems planning. To address these needs my research asks the following questions:

1. What is the role of farmers in Austin/Travis County food systems planning?
    a. What is the perceived role of farmers in Austin/Travis County food systems planning?
    b. What is the documented role of farmers in Austin/Travis County food systems planning?
    c. What is the potential role of farmers in Austin/Travis County food systems planning?
    d. How should farmers be considered in Austin/Travis County food systems planning?

I have chosen Austin and eastern Travis County as my study area because of my personal experience working with food various food system actors (see Map 1.1). With this experience I have observed a need for improved food systems planning within these geographic boundaries. Weissman & Potteiger (2018) point out that the regional scale is now the appropriate scale of intervention in food systems planning, broadened from a local/urban scale that was theorized in the beginning of formal food systems planning. The consideration of the urban-rural fringe is also of particular importance as well and here I define that space as the roughly 20-mile radius around Austin that extends to the Travis County boundaries (Parham, 2015). In light of these scalar considerations, Travis County was chosen as the broadest geographical area-of-interest in this study to give

special attention to a defined urban-rural fringe for Austin. It is also generally understood by planning practitioners and students that broad regional planning can be difficult to implement as the number of involved governing bodies increases.

There is ample research in the environmental planning field that shows the importance of the rural-urban fringe as an independent space from rural and urban (Parham, 2015; Brinkley, 2018). Combined with the work on the importance of agricultural land preservation, one can see the prospective issues associated with the current growth patterns in Austin and the rural-urban fringe to the east (APA, 1999). This can be seen in Travis County in the following maps, which illustrate the study area and the expansion of development through prime agriculture soils from 1987 to 2013 via building footprints.

Map of Study Area

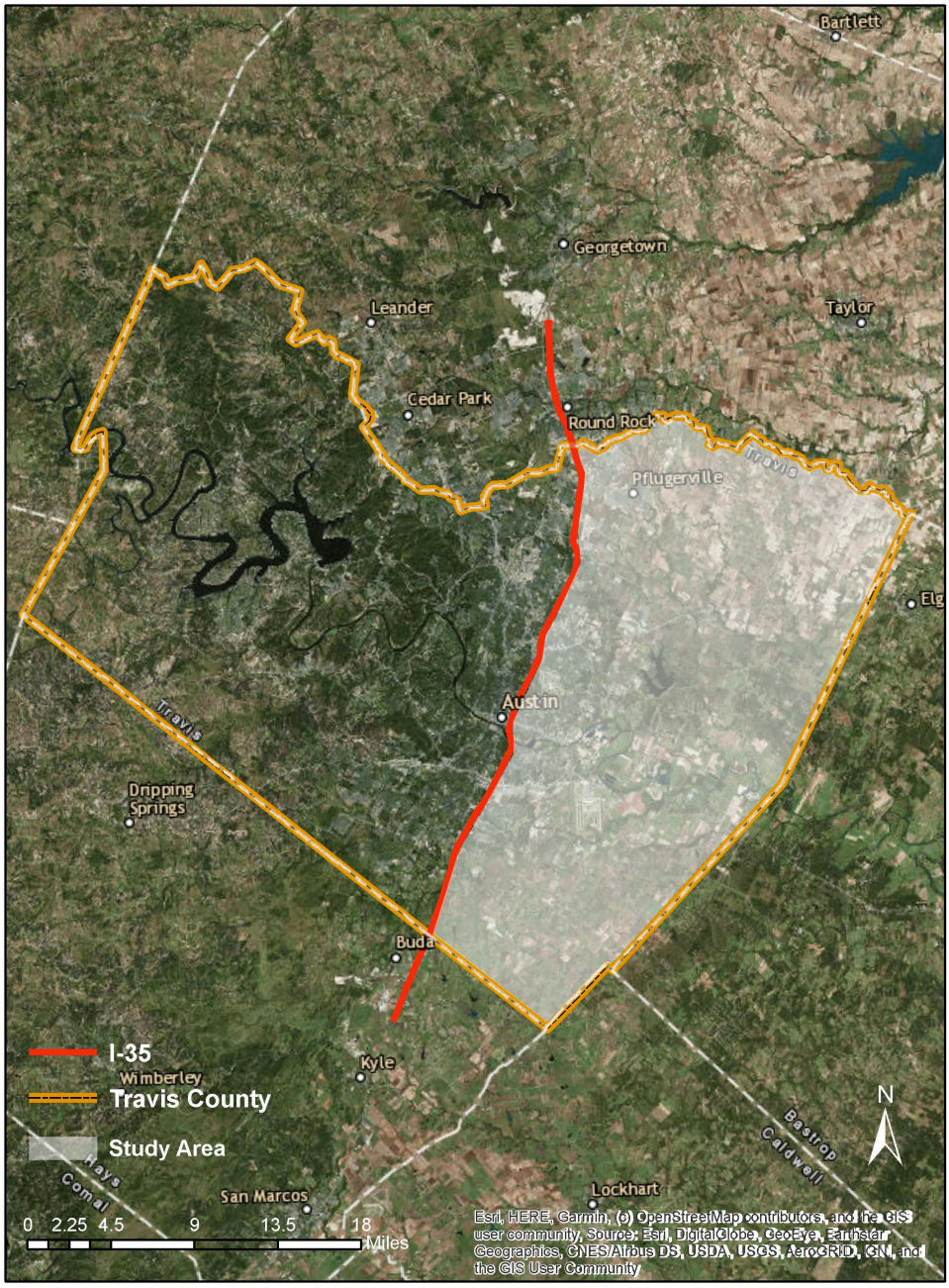

Figure 1: Map of Study Area (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Prime Agriculture Soils

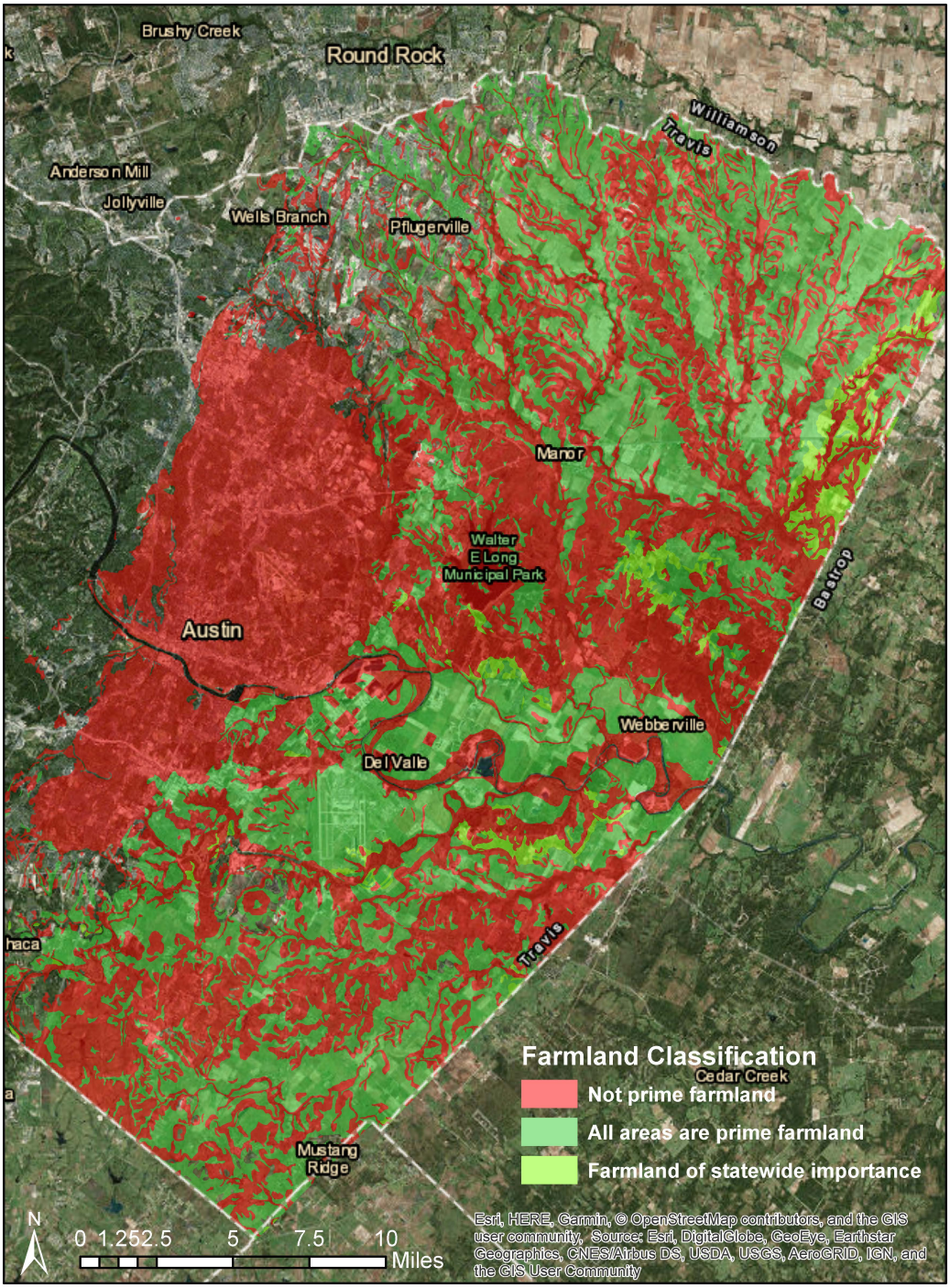

Figure 2: Prime Agriculture Soils in East Travis County (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Prime Agriculture Soils 1987

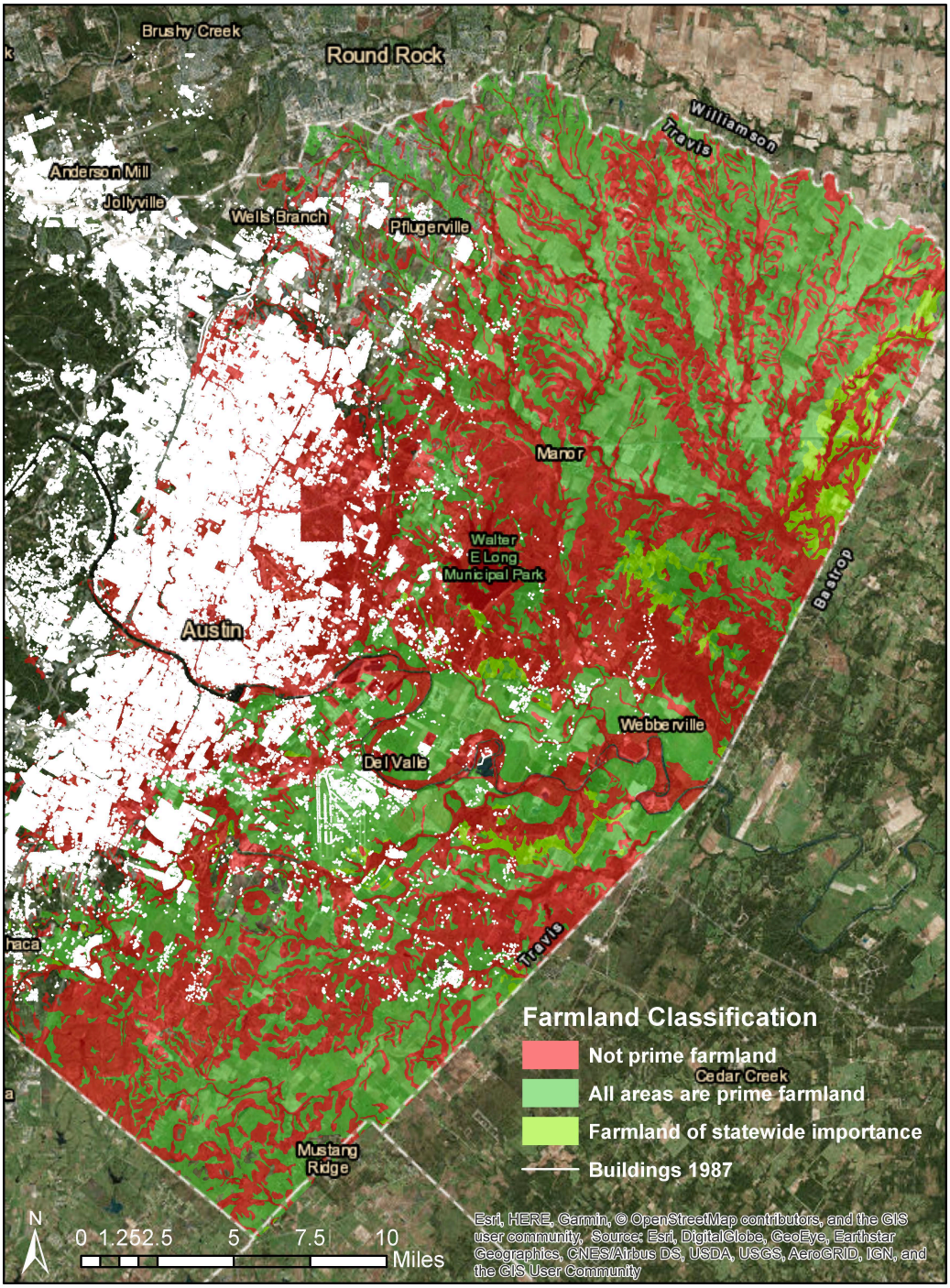

Figure 3: 1987 Building Coverage in Prime Agriculture Soils in East Travis County (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Prime Agriculture Soils 2013

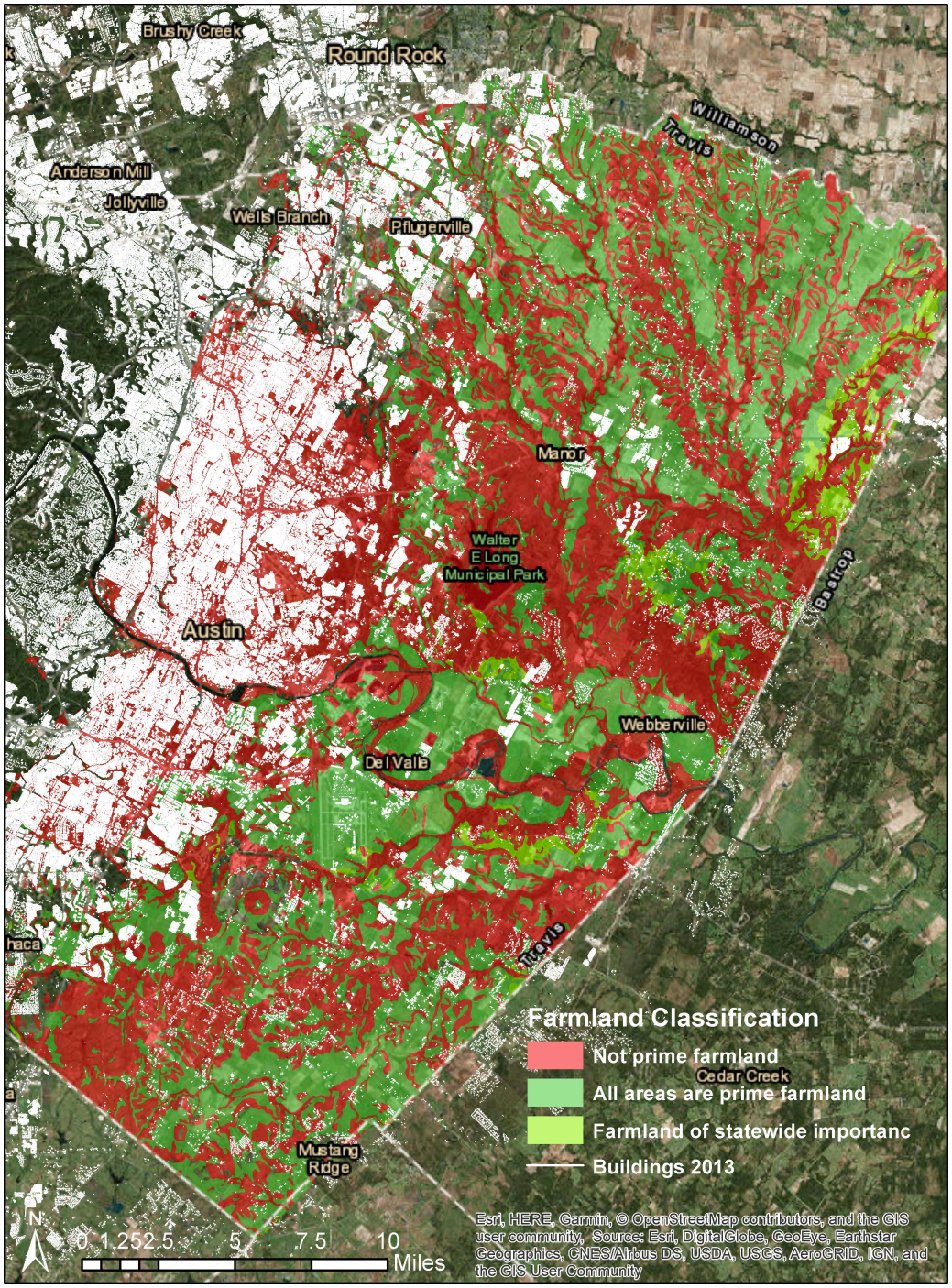

Figure 4: 2013 Building Coverage in Prime Agriculture Soils in East Travis County (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

It is the purpose of this research to show what is missing in Austin's food systems planning initiatives and identify what can be changed/added to create a more *equitable* food system for A/TC, a term that will be defined shortly. This will be done through interviews with farmers and farmworkers as well as food policy-oriented stakeholders and case study analyses of four food system planning initiatives that highlight the role of farmers in food systems planning and have benefited from the integration of farmer feedback generally.

The purpose of the present chapter is to briefly frame the research within planning theory, identify the research setting, and define terms used throughout the work. Chapter 2 will provide documentation of food systems planning (formal and informal) that has taken place in Austin and Travis County from the beginning of the 20th century, a history of food systems planning in A/TC (the documented role of farmers in A/TC food systems planning). Chapter 3 will describe the methods and methodology used in the research. Chapter 4 will provide a review of the relevant literature to ensure triangulation and corroboration of the present study. As this chapter will mark the middle of this work, I will once again review key terms to ensure consistent understanding by readers, especially as literature on several related topics is covered. Chapter 5 will describe and analyze the data gathered in stakeholder interviews. This chapter will be organized thematically based on recurrent themes found throughout interviews (the perceived role of farmers in A/TC food systems planning). Chapter 6 will then look at how farmers have been integrated in food systems planning in the U.S. by analyzing four case studies,

identifying how each has documented and been strengthened by farmer involvement (the potential role of farmers in A/TC food systems planning). Chapter 7 will then use data found in interviews and in case study analyses to develop seven recommendations for A/TC to strengthen their food systems planning (how farmers should be considered in A/TC food systems planning). Chapter 8 will provide a summary of findings and a framing of the work more generally; it will then offer final thoughts on food systems planning in Austin and Travis County and how we can improve.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Food systems have been defined by Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000) as "...the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated regulatory institutions and activities" (113). In practice, many planning institutions have adopted their own understanding of the term, but most fall somewhere within this given definition. The City of Austin specifies the need for a "sustainable" food system, one that keeps in mind the social, economic, and environmental implications of its day-to-day operation and processes (City of Austin, 2015). However, the cavalier use of the term *sustainability* has been critiqued for failing to "...yield a markedly different approach to constructing human societies to ensure the long-term welfare of the human and other species" (Smythe, 2014, 914). Though Smythe's (2014) critique of this term is not directly applicable to food systems planning, it offers a stepping-stone to redefining what a "good" food system might look like.

Smythe (2014) later recommends "A new sustainability paradigm [that] will illustrate consideration of the human spirit and broader human needs…" and combined with work on redefining how we look at food systems planning, supports what I call here, an *equitable* food system (927). This is based on Raja, Morgan, & Hall's (2017) definition of an equitable food system, one where "...planners'...engagement with the food system must propel cities and regions towards conditions where the marginalized lead fuller, richer lives, not only as beneficiaries of a better food system but as those who articulate its problems and define its solutions" (309). Furthermore, the term *sustainable* might connote a system that runs as a closed-loop, self-sustaining system, which would overlook the historic marginalization and exploitation of minorities in food systems around the world.

The term used for the research setting of this work varies throughout the literature. As such, I will define here, a standardized version of that term to be used throughout this work. This setting has been referred to as peri-urban, the peri-urban interface, the hinterland, the urban fringe, the rural-urban fringe, the rural-urban interface, the urban edge, the exurban, etc. Any number of combinations of those terms can be used to describe effectively the same space that I am considering in the present study. Simon (2008) points out however, that *peri-urban* is typically used to refer to that same space as it exists in the global South while the term *rural-urban fringe* is typically used to describe that same space as it exists in the global North. As this study takes place in North America, I will use the term *rural-urban fringe* throughout. Simon (2008) defines this

space as the "[o]uter edge or transition zone between urban and rural areas…" (170). As we will see later, this space is of particular interest to food systems planning, and as shown in Maps 1-3 above, the rural-urban edge in eastern Travis County is under the noticeable threat of development (Parham, 2015).

Stakeholders involved in the present research are predominantly farmers and farmworkers, though my understanding of these roles here might vary from other research within similar fields. Because I look here to capture the perceived role of farmers in food systems planning in A/TC, I am generally interested in stakeholders with a broader understanding of farm operations and interactions with the city/county. As such, I define farmers as farm owners/managers that run farming operations directly. Farmworkers are defined as those managers that work under head famers but lead specific operations within a farm organization. This might include harvest managers, marketing managers, sales managers, etc. I believe that these individuals possess a particular perspective on farming that can only come from focusing on one aspect of operations, and thus, offer valuable data in this research. Throughout the study I use the term *farm laborers* to describe seasonal and hourly workers and though they have valuable perspectives, as a means to narrow my sampling pool I have chosen to exclude them from the interviewing process.

This overview should set the tone for the rest of this work and provide enough background for the reader to understand the established problem and the stated goals of the research. The following chapter will look at the historic context of agriculture and

food systems planning in Austin and Travis County back to the beginning of the 20th Century. It will provide an important snapshot of how food systems planning has evolved in A/TC, bringing us to its present state.

Chapter 2: History of Food Systems Planning in Austin

The history of planning in Austin began in 1839 with Judge Edwin Waller's map "The Plan of the City of Austin" (Figure 5). This plan has acted as the backbone of urban development in Austin until today with additions and alterations made along the way, but remaining ultimately intact in Austin's current Central Business District (CBD). Then in 1928 "A City Plan for Austin Texas" set out to establish formal/codified planning principles for Austin, putting into effect racial zoning and codifying segregation in Austin (Tretter, 2012). This has been recognized by the City of Austin (2012) in the present day in their most recent comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin.

Later in Austin's life as a formally established city we see this codified racism continued to affect marginalized groups. Tretter (2016) cites McDonald (2012) stating that "[a]s Austin continued to grow, its employment structures, system of education, relations of social intercourse, housing patterns, and other factors were organized by both legal and extralegal means to ensure racial inequalities and white domination" (13). The same is certainly true of agriculture in the United States where slavery created an agricultural framework bound to the systematic marginalization of minorities and people of color. Ginapp (2003) shows that in the U.S. South, during the New Deal, when federal funding was being allocated to county committees to help boost agricultural production, Black farmers were pushed out of agriculture: "[t]he county committees used the federal aid money to systematically eliminate the [B]lack farmer in the South" (241).

Figure 5: Map of Original 1839 "Plan of the City of Austin" (L. J. Pilie)

Today these issues are still being brought to the courts, such as the recent lawsuit brought against the USDA for denying Black farmers governmental assistance on the basis of race (Charlier, 2017).

In Travis County today we still see that the number of White farmer operators (not owners) is nearly five times larger than the number of farm operators of color. That translates to 323 farm operators that identify as Black/African American, Spanish/Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and operators reporting more than one race; in contrast, there are 1,586 White farm operators in Travis County (USDA, 2012).

Structural racism and discrimination in the food system (globally, nationally, and locally) are extremely important issues, and touch every part of food systems planning. Understanding and proposing robust food systems plans must incorporate the challenging of these issues on every level if we are to truly work toward an equitable food system. There is important, multidisciplinary work on this subject and readers are encouraged to seek it out if they are at all interested in food systems research. However, here I will focus on the general need for farmer input in food systems planning and will not be offering an in-depth analysis of how racism and discrimination have and still affect the Austin/Travis food system. Readers should keep this in mind as they move through this work, as there is still work to be done beyond the general inclusion of farmers in food systems planning.

HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE IN AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY

The role of agriculture in Austin and Travis County has fluctuated throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, transitioning from a part of life for the majority of residents, to a less noticed and romanticized idealism of rural character surrounding a town. Now it is slowly making its way into the lives of Austin/Travis County citizens once more through community garden initiatives and a robust (yet threatened) urban agriculture scene. As early as the late 19th century, there were efforts to help support farmers in Travis County. Notably, we see the Travis County Farmers Alliance leasing land in the Austin city center for a public cotton market that catered to the needs of farmers in the area and offered them a space to sell their goods. As previously mentioned, the role of agriculture in Texas was much different than it is today, but we may still see similarities in the recent push for the acceptance and codification of farmers' markets in Austin. Chamber of Commerce Secretary W. E. Long stated in a 1915 article that "[t]o a city the size of Austin, there is no one that is of more vital importance to its wealth and progressiveness than the farming elements which surround it" (1). Throughout the early 20th century central Travis County had a large farming population. W. E. Long in the same 1915 article identifies 56,000 farm houses. Comparing this figure to 1920 census data we see a total Travis County population upwards of 57,000 and only 11,939 dwelling units. One might extrapolate from this data that the term *farm houses* refers to the number of residents actively farming in some capacity or another. The amount of farmed land in Travis County around

the same time was roughly 3,500 acres; this accounts for roughly 0.5% of the total land area of Travis County.

Moving into the 1920s and 1930s we begin to see the creation of farmer/rancher aid programs in Texas such as the 1937 agriculture conservation program that allocated a total of $200,000 to Travis County farmers and ranchers. In 1926 we also see smaller-scale incentivization of farming in the Travis County region such as local competitions with cash prizes. By 1940 there was roughly $1.25 million dollars of support for local agriculture from the federal, state, and local governments combined. Yet, according to an Austin American Statesman article from 1963, the number of farms drastically deceased between 1940 and 1960 from 2,647 to only 1,127. This decrease could be the result of smaller farms acquiring land owned previously by other farmers but is most likely due to a more typical cause such as the movement of rural populations to more urban areas, the buying of land by developers for suburbs (especially after the second world war), or the loss of young farmers to WWII. Findings from archival data available about Austin/Travis County agriculture highlight less direct forms of monetary support for farmers in the area than we saw previously. In 1973 for instance there is record of a Farm Forum hosted for area farmers and ranchers to help inform them of ways they could reduce their tax burden as active agricultural enterprises (Austin American Statesman, 1973). Four years later in 1977 in a Travis County newsletter there were also resources described for farmers related to financial aid due to prevented planting, and the loaning of storage facilities by the county (Remmert, 1977). Looking into the 21st Century we have

seen more of a focus on local production and sustainable farming practices, as well as the creation of an equitable food system where all Austin residents have access to healthy and affordable foods and local farmers have access to the large urban market that Austin provides in Travis County. We have also seen statewide efforts to draw farmers to Texas through programs such as the Young Farmers Grant Program, which began in 2010. Many of the efforts to create an equitable food system have involved the city and food related organizations such as the Sustainable Food Center, which produced a report in 2018 on the feasibility of a food hub for Central Texas (SFC, 2018). As part of this study, the SFC produced an enlightening quantitative snapshot of the state of agriculture in Central Texas (including Travis County):

Total Vegetable Farms	2012	351
	2007	307
Total Acres of Harvested Vegetables	2012	21,523
	2007	19,706
Total Acres of Cropland	2012	1,642,163
	2007	2,049,086

Figure 6: State of agriculture in Central Texas (SFC, 2018, 6)

These happenings create a food system narrative that focuses on the support of local (within the county/region) farmers. Though the role of agriculture was much different in the early 20th century, and certainly full of inequities, we might learn from our past here in attempting to understand how farmers can be supported by food systems planning done by the City of Austin and Travis County. We will see here that data collected in interviews with farmers supports this claim, as several interviews revealed the need for greater outreach by food policy officials, as well as monetary support from the city, county, and/or the state. If the tone of the Secretary's Chamber of Commerce memo, quoted at the beginning of this section, is at least somewhat representative of the role of agriculture in Austin/Travis County in the early to mid 20th century one can assume that that role has changed significantly in the early 21st century. Now that a brief history of planning and a snapshot of the history of agriculture in Austin/Travis County have been covered, I will look more closely at what is being done today by the city and the county to create an equitable food system.

The Austin City Council, in 2008, put forward a motion to create a policy board within the Office of Sustainability to address food policy issues within Austin and Travis County. It was defined in the creating ordinance that the board would:

> ...serve as an advisory body to the City Council and Travis County Commissioner's Court concerning the need to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, locally, and sustainably-grown food at reasonable prices for all

> residents, particularly those in need, by coordinating the relevant activities of city government, as well as non-profit organizations, and food and farming businesses.
>
> (Austin City Council, 2008, 2)

This general purpose is accompanied by a list of seven more specific objectives for the food policy board:

1. Monitor the availability, price and quality of food throughout the Austin and Travis County area
2. Collect data on the food security (i.e., access to an affordable, diversified local food supply) and the nutritional status of city residents
3. Inform city and county policy makers, administrators, and the public-at-large about the status of the region's food system and food security
4. Monitor and analyze the administration of city and county food and nutrition programs
5. Explore new means for the city and county to improve the local food economy, the availability, sustainability, accessibility, and quality of food and our environment, and assist city and county departments in the coordination of their efforts
6. Review availability and recommend measures to promote the preservation of agricultural land in the City of Austin and Travis County

7. Recommend to the city and county adoption of measures that will improve existing local food production and add new programs, incentives, projects, regulations, or services

(Austin City Council, 2008, 2-3)

It is interesting to note here that the preservation of prime agricultural land is not included in The Board's general purpose statement, though it is listed here in under specific objectives. This may seem inconsequential, but consistency is and will be important for food systems planning in A/TC as it becomes more well-defined.

Over the past decade that board has worked to create a more equitable and sustainable food system in Austin/Travis County. Here, I will discuss and analyze their work through their cumulative meeting minutes produced 2009-2018, as well as reports produced by the Office of Sustainability and relevant third-parties on the Austin/Travis County food system.

By 2009 the Sustainable Food Policy Board (renamed The Austin Travis County Food Policy Board in 2016 (ATCFPB)) was having its first meeting and planning actionable policy recommendations for creating a city that is hospitable to local food production and easy access to healthy foods. Again, this is not completely dissimilar to the efforts by the Travis County Farmers Alliance in the early 20th Century. However, we now see the city/county actively taking equity and sustainability into account when making their decisions. At its induction as a policy board there were specialized

committees that worked tangentially to the ATCFPB on more specific types of issues (i.e. production/business, and access/wellness). As the food policy board became more established, it appears that those committees were absorbed back into the realm of the original food policy board. Here I will analyze meeting minutes compiled from the ATCFPB to identify topic trends over the past decade (Table 2.1 provides a summary of findings by year). This will begin to show where priorities are now for A/TC in regards to food systems planning. It is important to note however, that meeting minutes are meant to be a coarse synopsis of what occurred in meetings and not necessarily what led to those actions/inactions, or who was consulted. For this reason, conclusive actions cannot be based on these minutes alone. Rather, it they will provide a snapshot of what has occurred in and what has been prioritized by one specific governmental food system entity in the past decade.

2009[1]

The newly founded "Sustainable Food Policy Board" (The Board) held its first recorded meeting in December of 2009, at which they established the goals for themselves as a board. The goals of The Board at this time were focused on gathering/compiling information and drafting recommendations/resolutions. Topics in this first year included egg grading, tax exemptions for organic farmers, and an assessment of the state of the food system. This seems to be a good start to addressing issues, and adheres to The Board's purpose as outlined in the creation ordinance. However, it is still unclear at this

point in the analysis what is and what should be the role of farmers in later policy recommendations.

2010[2]

The beginning of 2010 was focused on addressing established policies and laws that hindered the ability of farms to exist and/or operate within the city limits and the urban market that Austin offers to area farmers. This included things such as noise complaints from roosters in residential neighborhoods, farmers market permitting discrepancies, and simply establishing what the best practices are for urban farming and community garden policies/planning. Other issues mentioned in the 2010 meetings included water fee waivers for organic farms, tax exemption, some sort of communication and outreach development through email and web presence, and input into the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, and we begin to see a discussion of access to affordable and healthy food, which will be a consistent topic for The Board through the following years. In this year the only topics discussed by the board that really affect county-wide farmers are the accessibility of urban farmers markets through appropriate permitting, tax exemptions for organic farms, a farmer and end seller roundtable event (though unclear who are how many farmers were present at this event), and a discussion of a city/county food procurement policy. These topics seemed to be secondary to more pointed issues within the Austin city limits, leading one to wonder what the county representation looks like in a board that is supposed to be recommending policies for Austin and Travis County.

2011[3]

In 2011 The Board began considering how to become recognized by the STAR community index. This index measures how well communities are attending to and achieving sustainability goals, part of which includes the protection and encouraged sustainable use of "working lands" (which includes farms and ranches) as well as increased sales and consumption of locally produced foods. In this year The Board also began looking toward helping farmers in the area through policy and program initiatives (included in STAR community indices). For instance there was a push for food production and land protection to be included in the Austin Community Climate Plan, holding a community input session (one might assume that farmers are included in this but as with many such events, citizen participation can be inherently skewed toward one or a few groups, be it demographic or otherwise). The Board also drafted a letter to the mayor in the later part of the year in which they advocated for drought support for local farmers, 2011 being the driest year in recorded history for Texas. With these efforts to address farmers around the county as well as in the city, The Board introduced solid waste discussions, began work on a foodshed assessment for Central Texas, and kept updated on initiatives from the previous year. This included topics such as egg sales and processing, community garden/urban farm ordinances, Imagine Austin input, and farmers market permitting.

2012[4]

The Board was very active in 2012, keeping their eyes on equitable access to healthy foods for all citizens through programs such as SNAP and through mapping of food deserts, as well as those topics discussed in the previous year. The Board also began looking into more planning and policy related initiatives to foster an environment that is conducive to the local production and consumption of healthy foods. The Board began drafting a letter of recommendation for the 2012 Farm Bill in the beginning of the year, looking into parking waivers for low income families near farmers market, correcting zoning in the city limits to allow for community gardens and urban farming and set priorities for themselves going forward. Out of nine priorities, The Board voted on the top four to move forward with. These included Fostering Local Capacity, Mapping of Food Deserts, Coordinating with the Office of Sustainability, and Removing Zoning and Other Barriers to Entry of Community Gardens and Urban Farms. Though "Fostering Local Capacity" might include a capacity for farming to occur in Austin and Travis County, it is unclear here whether or not the priority was meant for all aspects of the food system or a specific element of it. That being said, one of the priorities that was voted off the list was the assessment of available land for agriculture, though we will see in later reports and in discussions later on in the same year by The Board that this assessment did eventually occur.

2013[5]

There was a notable increase in farmer participation at meetings in 2013. Though there were not necessarily actions taken to address the concerns that famers raised at meetings, this participation shows that outreach has been at least effective enough to get farmers and other citizens to the meetings to air their grievances. This increase also coincides with the 2013 economic impact assessment of the food sector in Austin and with a major overhaul in land-use code that would directly affect urban farms (Vickery, 2014). Throughout the year The Board also made an increased effort at community outreach in general including an updated listserv and a discussion on the possibility of televising meetings in the future. We began to see long-term projects come to fruition in 2013 as well, with funding being allocated in the city budget and grant money rolling in, especially for SNAP programs. In this year, The Board added several new topics to their list including dealing with food surplus, gathering data for and conducting an economic impact analysis of the Austin-Travis County food system, and looking into ways to help healthy food venues and procurement thrive in the city. I believe 2013 was the first year The Board started to make notable progress in working toward their described purpose. Still, though, there is an overwhelming focus by The Board on urban food issues. With their charge to "...serve as an advisory body to the City Council and Travis County Commissioner's Court…" it seems that they could do quite a bit more work with small

rural farmers and food networks outside of the work the Farmland Preservation working group is engaged in (Austin City Council, 2008, 2).

2014[6]

2014 saw the hiring of the City's first Food Policy Manager. Having this direct staff support was a catalyst for progress, whether initiating contact with other organizations or identifying ways to move forward, the utilization of a food policy manager enabled The Board to set clearer and more incremental goals for themselves. There has been, previous to 2014, confusion surrounding the land use code requirements for urban agriculture (seen here as community gardens and urban farms) that The Board begins to address this confusion by making recommendations for code land use code clarifications/changes. Within the same year, land use codes were changed to admit the previously "illegal" urban farms to operate legally within the city limits. The Board began discussing laws more often in 2014 leading one to believe once again that they were starting down the road of more long-term solutions. As mentioned previously there was an increase in the proposed partnerships and collaborations by The Board; this included conversations with Travis County on defining/understanding sustainable agriculture. The Board ended the year by setting goals for the following year that were characterized mostly by the preservation of prime farmland and an increase in various healthy food accessibility elements.

2015[7]

In an attempt to better address food system issues, The Board began allocating time in certain meetings to presentations on breaking news in the food policy realm. Presumably, this was able to help them understand what differences they could make and where they would be most useful recommending policy changes. Their own initiatives in 2015 were much more focused on food access programs however. There were recommendations by individual farming organizations as to ways to help promote local food production, again centered on land availability; the Board responded to these recommendations with an announcement of investigations into the availability of county lands for farmland preservation. While the initiative The Board has taken by creating a Working Group for farmland preservation and looking into available lands is important (as we will see later in this work), there are other food system concerns for producers that need to be addressed in these meetings. Similar to The Board's analysis of the several elements of food access, they could show how supply/production are threatened by multiple factors.

2016[8]

The Office of Sustainability proposed a new program in 2016. The Good Food Purchasing Program, proposes a partnership with local, regional, state, and federal institutions to promote the purchasing of sustainably sourced, local foods (Marty, 2016) is proposed in the hopes that not only local producers benefit, but that consumers have

more readily available healthy foods and are exposed to sustainably sourced foods on a regular basis (Marty, 2016). Marty (2016) shows that in this year, partnerships already established included a mix of governmental, academic, non-profit, healthcare, and corporate institutions.

Introduced five years prior, in 2016 we see the re-emergence of a discussion on food and climate change as The Board looks into consulting on the Austin Community Climate Plan once again. Along with this consultation The Board holds discussions on carbon sequestration practices possible in the Austin/Travis County food system. The Board continued their search for funding sources to boost healthy food access in 2016 but also looked toward funding allocations for various studies on the Austin/Travis County food system. This shows that The Board is looking to boost their regional knowledge as well as their knowledge of urban issues so as to adjust their recommendations to encompass the larger regional food system Austin is a part of. The farmland preservation working group, which historically has had the widest geographical focus of The Board's working groups, was looking into funding for community gardens in 2016. This doesn't seem to be particularly relevant to farmland preservation as community gardens can be built using a raised bed/container system, which don't necessarily require prime farmland. Community gardens have also really only been discussed in an urban context for Austin by The Board, where the amount of prime farmland is negligible if present at all. This might be a step backwards for the farmland preservation working group; this is

not to say that there is no need for community garden funding but rather, to highlight the need for monitored organization in these working groups.

2017[9]

Urban and regional food systems can benefit from the establishment of a food hub for farmers, consumers, distributors, and institutions to come together in one cohesive space (SFC, 2018). In 2017 The Board began discussions on acquiring funding for a food hub under the purpose of increasing food access, but the benefits would be multifaceted as we see in the Food Hub Viability Study produced in the following year (SFC, 2018). This represents a major step forward for regional food systems planning by The Board. Generally, The Board is still mainly interested in addressing food access inequities in their meetings, establishing five subcategories of food access to tackle in 2017 (Healthy Corner Stores, Schools, Mobile Markets, Incentive Programs, Assistance Programs). The Board also began addressing their need for program and plan evaluation, looking into monitoring the outcomes of what they had implemented in the past years. As Seasons (2003) points out, monitoring works to strengthen many plans and planning processes. It's good to see that as The Board approaches their tenth year they are holding themselves and their recommendations accountable. 2017 also saw The Board's efforts gearing toward more food recovery initiatives, including establishing permits and permitting procedures for food donations from food businesses.

2018[10]

In The Board's latest full year of meetings, tangential issues took the spotlight. Paid sick leave for food workers was a particularly hot topic in 2018, and The Board was working to do their part in recommending appropriate policies. Locating affordable housing in Austin came to The Board's attention as well as access to urban amenities is a key issue for the location of affordable housing, including healthy food options. Addressing topics such as these will help to help to highlight the need for food systems planning in practice moving forward. To see the connection of so many subsections of planning to food will be invaluable in forming the narrative argument for food systems planning necessary to establish a practical food systems planning framework. There was a lot of work done on accessing city and county lands for agriculture by The Board in 2018 but they looked into accessing urban amenities as well (mainly municipal water). We know that access to urban amenities is concerning to the viability of agricultural activities that occur in the urban-rural interface and that novel solutions are needed to address this if we hope to preserve this space (Brinkley, 2018). To see The Board looking into these issues (brought to them by a farmer operating in the urban-rural interface) is hopeful not only to the future of farming in Travis County but to their concern with the farmers' perspectives on what issues are of highest priority in food systems planning. Lastly, permitting for food pantries was raised as an issue throughout the 2018 meetings leading to the

recommendation that food pantry permitting be codified, especially in the latest version of CodeNEXT.

ANALYSIS

In general The Board has done significantly more work on urban agricultural issues that rural/regional issues. Through there is a working group for farmland preservation that is looking into acquiring farmland around the county, there could be more focus in monthly meetings in considering ways to reach out not only to the community, but to farmers specifically. This might include a push for more farmer membership on The Board. A brief analysis of The Board's historic membership shows that from its induction up to the present only 5.9% of members have been known active farmers, this translates to only three board members over a ten-year period. Presently, it seems that The Board is defining food systems problems and reaching out to the public for their feedback on the best ways to address those problems; the problem here lies in The Board's positionality. As an established board of what might be called food systems experts, it would be difficult for the community or farmers to argue against problems that The Board identifies. This creates a false atmosphere of progress where possibly crucial issues are not being addressed on a regular basis simply because they are not voiced. That being said, the identified issues may well be the highest priorities for area farmers, but how will we know without reaching out to them directly? As Elling (2017) shows that to ensure

the best planning results, we must include as many perspectives as possible. We do see that working groups engage in more direct outreach with the community through regular meetings at which they report high turnouts from "...land preservation, food, farming and community advocates" (ATCFPB, 2016, 2). But, the results of having farming and food "advocates" at meetings is in stark contrast to what we might see in farmer meetings and one can only wonder if this is a semantic glorification of community members with an interest in farming or other food policymakers.

It is necessary for The Board to address urban issues in concert with rural issues if they hope to foster an equitable food system for Austin/Travis County. As shown above, it is part of their charge to work with the city and county and through a thorough analysis of their meeting minutes, to date it seems that their collaboration with and recommendations to the County are lacking. There are other organizations that are tackling such issues at the county, state, and national level, but speaking to the responsible growth management of Austin's urban space, this is something that should be taken more seriously by The Board.

2009	The Board holds its first meeting, setting goals to gather data and assess the A/TC food system.
2010	The Board works on barriers to farming in urban areas. Rural/county-wide issues seem to be of less concern.
2011	Notable increase in attention given to farmers by The Board. Resources and benchmarks of farmer support begin to move through program recommendations.
2012	Equitable access to healthy food is the key phrase here. Some in-house organization occurs in the form of formalized priorities for The Board.
2013	Increase in farmer participation in meetings during land-use code rewrite. Projects begin to receive funding and long-term goals begin to be met.
2014	Board organization refined as the city's first Food Policy Manager is brought in. Increase in Board collaboration with other local/regional food system organizations.
2015	The Board focuses most of their attention on food access programs. An investigation into available county land for agricultural use is announced in response to farmer concerns.
2016	Good Food Purchasing Program proposed by The Board. Climate change and the role of the food system considered/discussed. Farmland preservation working group narrows focus to urban lands for community gardens.
2017	Ideas on regional food hubs begin to surface. The Board looks deeper into food access issues, establishing subcategories for investigation. Monitoring and plan evaluation begin to be practiced by The Board.
2018	Tangential food systems issues such as affordable housing and paid sick leave addressed. Work done on city/county land access for agricultural uses as well as access to urban amenities on those lands.

Table 1: Summary Table of ATCFPB Meeting Minute Analysis

REPORTS

The office of sustainability is now also partnering with organizations such as the Sustainable Food Center (SFC) in Austin to produce reports on the status and viability of certain food systems programs. These reports are used to inform the policy decisions made by Austin City Council and have been points of contact for the Austin Travis

County Food Policy Board to inform their own policy recommendations at the city and county levels. Most recently SFC partnered with the Austin Office of Sustainability, Texas Center for Local Food, National Center for Appropriate Technology, and FarmShare Austin to create the Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub (2018). In the report, the explicit goal is "...to understand the opportunities and barriers to a physical food hub in Central Texas that might allow small to mid-sized farms meet larger-volume demand in Austin and San Antonio, and to build on already existing initiatives to increase healthy food access for low-income and underserved populations" (SFC, 2018, 1). The study consisted of data gathering via surveys, focus groups, and interviews involving a variety of stakeholders including farmers, mostly in the Central Texas region, and found that the majority of producers are looking for more wholesale sales options (SFC, 2018). The Study also resulted in a list of action items shown here:

Action	Timeframe
Provide business management & financial consultations for producers.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Build the Elgin Local Food produce processing center.	Near Term (2021-2023)
Matchmaking between producers and market accounts.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Assist producers to become wholesale ready.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Establish micro-aggregation nodes.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Facilitate land access for agricultural producers.	Near Term (2021-2023)
Develop a group purchasing or equipment share for producers.	Near Term (2021-2023)
Assist producers who are interested in transitioning to regenerative agricultural practices.	Near Tem (2021-2023)
Research the potential of a food industry cluster.	Long Term (2023-2028)
Support and outreach for Federal farm programs.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Strengthen farm labor force so producers can hire qualified labor.	Near Term (2021-2023)

Figure 7: Action items from Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub (SFC, 2018, 2)

While the focus of the study is on the relationship between producers and buyers, the central research question is consumer-oriented asking: "Does Central Texas need something new or additional to bring more local, sustainably-grown fresh produce into the marketplace in order to strengthen the viability of regional producers and improve

consumer access to healthy, fresh food?" (SFC, 2018, 1). Focusing on the wholesale market for producers and buyers might also be focusing too much on a revenue stream that offers the lowest return per unit for farmers but that is something that might be explored in an addendum to SFC study.

The Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub shows that organizations are making actionable plans geared toward creating an equitable regional food system that Travis County and Austin will be part of, and as compared to outreach efforts conducted by the Austin Travis County Food Policy Board, set a much more reasonable precedent for the level of farmer outreach that is needed in such an endeavor.

The City of Austin Office of Sustainability (OoS) has also produced two State of the Food System Reports (2015, 2018) in which the OoS highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints presented by the Austin/Travis County food system. The 2015 Austin OoS report looked at community case studies of urban farms and other food organizations in Austin, describing what they were working toward and what they have accomplished in reference to creating a sustainable food system. The study also looked at area food sales, consumption patterns, and recovery initiatives (Austin OoS, 2015). What is particularly useful in this study is the conclusion, in which the Austin OoS highlight what progress can be made including the increase of local food production, consumption, and sales; up scaling food infrastructure; and improving food waste recovery in Austin/Travis County (2015). The 2018 State of the Food System

Report follows a similar template but compares our current state to that of 2015 instead of describing brief case studies from around the city (Austin OoS, 2018).

These reports are, again, useful for council and board members to reference when creating/recommending policies. However, they highlight only the evaluative process of food systems planning in Austin/Travis County. While this is an integral part of the planning process, the need for tangible action plans (namely to address our less than 1% of locally produced food consumed) is paramount (Austin OoS, 2018). The 2018 State of the Food System Report also claims that "[s]ince 2015, efforts to strengthen Austin's food system have been focused on expanding local food production, increasing demand for locally grown food, improving access to nutritious food, and reducing food waste" (Austin OoS, 2018, 3). But we have seen in the documents analyzed above that the majority of production expansion has only occurred in the form of urban agriculture (i.e. urban farms and community gardens) and while urban agriculture has its role, it is certainly not the only form of local food production we should be focusing our attention on.

In this chapter I have outlined and analyzed the local (Austin/Travis County) happenings in food systems planning, following a chronological analysis that began in in the early 20th Century and ended in the present day. My hope here is to provide context for the rest of this study, highlighting what role farmers have played in food systems planning (formally and informally) heretofore in Austin/Travis County. We have seen that early in the city of Austin's existence there was an understanding of the importance

of agriculture to the region and that support was needed for farmers in the region. More recently we saw directed work being done by governmental bodies to create an equitable food system, attempting to address all aspects of the food system, but perhaps falling short in the regional production aspect of that work. In the following chapter I will discuss my methodology for this research and show how I have worked to strengthen internal and external validity within the study.

Chapter 3: Methods/Methodology

In this thesis I will be conducting an exploratory qualitative study of the role of farmers in Austin/Travis County food systems planning. I have chosen to approach this topic from a qualitative point of view because the nature of my inquiry requires the building of a narrative, a narrative centered on the actions/inactions, accessibility/inaccessibility, awareness/non-awareness, etc. of farmers in Austin and Travis County. I could just as well look into quantifying the effect local farmers have on the A/TC food system through an economic impact assessment, or by analyzing trends in A/TC farmer production patterns as Austin has grown over the past half-century. These endeavors may be just as fruitful and produce interesting, useful results. However, I believe a qualitative analysis of farmer self-perceived roles in A/TC coupled with an analysis of existing A/TC food systems documents will build a stronger narrative space for farmers to exist and operate in A/TC as the city continues to grow. This, I hope, will lead to a stronger argument for the preservation of physical space for farmers to exist and operate in Travis County, complementing quantitative figures that appear to be driving local food systems efforts currently.

DATA

As mentioned previously, I will specifically focus on farms located in the eastern portion of Travis County beginning in Austin, and continuing to the Travis/Bastrop County line. This includes the urban, rural, and urban-rural interface; within these geographical contexts I will explore the how farmers are engaged in the A/TC food system. In my analysis I will draw primarily from five types of data: interview data, case study data, archival data, documents, and participant observation. These various forms of data are used to achieve triangulation, serving to improve validity in this study, defined here as "measurement validity is specifically concerned with whether operationalization and the scoring of cases adequately reflect the concept the researcher seeks to measure" (Adcock & Collier, 2001, 529).

INTERVIEWS

To gain insight into the perceptions A/TC farmers have on multiple stages of the A/TC food system, I conducted semi-structured interviews with specific stakeholders active is Austin's food system including farmers, contacts at the Sustainable Food Center, and contacts in the Office of Sustainability. Semi-structured interviewing styles allowed me to direct the dialogue when needed but also left room for topics/tangents that I had not thought to include in my interview guide. In this way, using semi-structured interviewing methods helped to boost the internal validity of my study. Interviewees were selected

using a variety of sampling methods: purposive sampling, using what I know about stakeholders in Austin's food system to select initial interviewees; and referral sampling, whereby I use interviewees' knowledge of other stakeholder involvement to guide my selection of second round interview participants. Because this research is targeted at a population active in a specific location, I believe that purposive sampling is the best way to begin identifying stakeholders. Previous work in agriculture in A/TC has also given me a unique opportunity to use relationships that have been previously established to my advantage, and to the advantage of the research. Familiarity with research subjects may help address power dynamics that would otherwise hinder interview results. My positionality is far different coming to farmers as a farmer myself than it would be if I were coming to them purely as an academic researcher. I also recognize that this same familiarity might create a conflict of interest for certain interviewees. I do believe that the maintenance of subject confidentiality and anonymity will help to address this issue, and each subject was briefed on this before interviews began.

CASE STUDY

From interviews I hope to gain insight into the current perceived goals of farmers in A/TC food systems planning; to complement this data it is useful to understand the existing, acknowledged roles of farmers are in other contexts. To achieve this I conducted a brief analysis of food systems planning in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and in Central

New York (regional food system). Geddes (1990) warns of the biases presented when only cases of desired outcomes are studied. Here, the main purpose of these cases is to illustrate what food systems planning can look like with the inclusion and consideration of farmers, not to include them as a broader analysis of food systems planning in the United States.

ARCHIVAL DATA AND DOCUMENTS

Limited amounts of data were gathered from archival records of the Austin History Center on planning and agricultural happenings around Austin back to one of the earliest recorded plans for the City of Austin in 1839. The purpose of this archival data here is to illustrate the historical context of food systems planning in A/TC and to understand how agriculture and planning together have led to the establishment of the more formal food systems planning we see in A/TC today.

Once the historical context was established through archival data, data collection from working documents in A/TC food systems planning was gathered and analyzed to better understand the stated and actual goals of planning institutions; this data is to work alongside interviews with food policy leaders in A/TC. The principle amount of data here was gathered through the analysis of Austin Travis County Food Policy Board meeting minutes from their inaugural meeting in late 2009 through their last reported meeting minutes in 2018. Additionally, the Imagine Austin comprehensive plan, multiple State of

the Food System Reports, and summary documents on various food programs started by A/TC affiliates (i.e., the City of Austin Office of Sustainability) were reviewed for mention of farmer input/consideration in achieving goals of an equitable food system. Finally, policy guides set by the American Planning Association on community and regional food planning were reviewed to understand what general standards have been set for inclusion of farmers in food systems planning.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Three years of personal work in the A/TC food system in various occupational roles within farming operations will inform my research as well. Participant observation here is the informal observation, by the researcher, of processes and requirements farmers face to successfully operate in A/TC. The inclusion of participant observations in this research is minimal but present throughout and relates mostly to how farmers get access to the resources they need and who they interact with. Because these observations occurred while I was working in the A/TC food system as a farmer it is important to note the possibility of biases being present in the observations. I have accounted for possible biases in my own reflection on participant observation and looked to eliminate them from this research but the possibility of biases is still present.

MEASUREMENT

In this study I am exploring the role of farmers in food systems planning in Austin and Travis County. To measure this I coded interviews with key food systems stakeholders, most of which are farmers. I also coded and analyzed Austin Travis County Food Policy Board meeting minutes and other previously mentioned documents to compare the referencing of farmers in previous work by the City of Austin and Travis County to the role farmers identify themselves.

MAPPING

Part of my research includes understanding the need for good food systems planning in Travis County. To illustrate this and to complement data previously gathered, I created maps showing development trends in relation to prime farmland in Travis County. It is useful to visualize the direct and indirect loss of farmland over the past few decades to show the need for farmers to be supported by planning efforts, not only through farmland preservation efforts but through whatever means they feel are necessary.

Chapter 4: Literature Review

Here I provide a review of the literature as it relates to my present study of the role of farmer/farmworker input in defining and realizing stated and needed food systems goals in A/TC. I begin by reviewing literature on food systems planning, generally. I will also review literature on the role of the rural-urban fringe in the production of urban place/space, as my research setting is defined as Austin's urban-rural fringe in eastern Travis County, where a large amount of prime agricultural soil resides and where development has continued to occur over the past 30 years. To date there seems to be a lack of literature produced by the City of Austin/Travis County on the role of farmer/farmworker input in their food system planning process, though there have been policy recommendations and goals put in place to create a "sustainable food system" where access to healthy food has been central and facilitation of local production seems to be an inconsequential add-on if present at all (Bidiuc, 2015). In reviewing the relevant literature I will showcase the importance of food systems to planning historically, justify my research setting, and present an existing body of work showing the disconnect between the sustainable food system Austin/Travis County are currently achieving and a truly equitable (sustainable) food system. Literature has been chosen on the basis of land use contexts most relevant to Austin and as such, has been limited to studies of North American/European cities and hinterlands. There is also a large and important body of literature discussing structural racism in the food system and how that affects farming

viability for women and people of color. However, that topic will not be covered in this study as I am looking at the possible exclusion of farmer input generally from food systems planning in Austin/Travis County. Readers are encouraged to explore the literature on structural racism and sexism in the food system as complementary to this work as it is paramount to the creation of an equitable food system not only in Austin but globally.

Before the literature is reviewed here, several terms will need to be defined once more, for consistency. First, food systems as Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000) define them are "...the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated regulatory institutions and activities" (113). The City of Austin goes a step further in defining their envisioned "sustainable" food system as one that is viewed through the lens of sustainability, meaning that it keeps in mind the social, economic, and environmental implications of its day-to-day operation and processes (City of Austin, 2015). Throughout this study I will be calling for measures leading to an *equitable* food system rather than a *sustainable* food system only because the term *sustainable* might connote a system that runs as a closed-loop, self-sustaining system, which would overlook the historic marginalization and exploitation of groups in the food systems around the world. In attempting a rough understanding of an equitable food system I offer a definition presented by Raja, Morgan, & Hall (2017) as one where "...planners'...engagement with the food system must propel cities and regions towards conditions where the marginalized lead fuller, richer lives, not

only as beneficiaries of a better food system but as those who articulate its problems and define its solutions" (309).

Finally, the term used for the space in which the present study will take place has many forms throughout the literature: peri-urban, the peri-urban interface, the hinterland, the urban fringe, the rural-urban fringe, the rural-urban interface, the urban edge, the exurban, etc. As shown previously, Simon (2008) points out that *peri-urban* is typically used to refer to that same space as it exists in the global South while the term *rural-urban fringe* is typically used to describe that same space as it exists in the global North. As this study takes place in North America, I will use the term *rural-urban fringe* or the "[o]uter edge or transition zone between urban and rural areas…" (Simon, 2008, 170).

With terms defined and the topic described, I will now move into a review of the relevant literature in order to orient the reader within the existing discussion that has been ensuing around this topic.

FOOD SYSTEMS AND PLANNING

In beginning to tackle the role of farmer/farmworker input in planning in Austin/Travis County, it is helpful first to step back (both in scale and historically) from the study setting and view the historical role of food systems in city planning. Historically, we see that planning around food and agriculture predate what one might call the era of modern planning (turn of the 20th Century) and that in North America this relationship can be

traced back to colonial town structuring (Vitiello & Brinkley, 2013). In subsequent town and city developments as settlers in the United States moved west we also saw a coevolution of agriculture/food systems development alongside city development, where one was not necessarily the result of the other (Cronon, 1991). Though this relationship can be traced back to early beginnings in city planning, there were fluctuations in the amount of attention given to food systems. At a certain point, planning for food systems shifted from the hands of the planner to the hands of the food industry and we began to see the influx of food processing and distribution facilities near and in cities while agricultural land was taken over by development and reallocated to monoculture operations in rural lands (Vitiello & Brinkley, 2013). This control still influenced planners' perceptions of food systems until as late as 2000 when Pothukuchi & Kaufman (2000) showed this trend in their survey of 22 planning agencies around the US. Still we see today a reemergence of food systems planning frameworks in the hands of planners, and aptly so, as Vitiello & Brinkley (2013) also point out that food systems are connected in one way or another to many of the planning sub-disciplines including environmental, land use, transportation, and community development.

As we begin to examine key historical plans with an eye for food systems, the presence of the food system becomes more obvious. One finds strong evidence of this, for example, in Howard's 1989 Garden Cities of To-Morrow. Howard (1965) creates his Garden City model around the integration of the agricultural estate into the fabric of planned open space and urban space cohesion, even though, in fact, the city itself was to

be built upon agricultural lands. Howard (1965) also discusses the benefits of such an integration for not only the city residents but for the farmers; as farmers would gain benefits from the proximity to such a large and demanding market, citizens could benefit from seeing a ready supply of food within their region while maintaining the trade that brings in more exotic food stuffs (Howard, 1965). All the while, the regional agricultural rents supported by the purchases made in the urban market, would act as funding for parks and road improvements that both citizens and farmers alike could benefit from (Howard, 1965). Another important part of Howard's Garden City plan as it relates to food systems planning for this study is his integration not only of specifically dedicated agricultural land but also his attention to agricultural resources such as an agriculture college (Howard, 1965). This type of investment ensures that not only are farmers able to farm in the rural-urban fringe on available land, but are able to train future generations and gain insights into new and more responsible practices, which will in turn benefit the region. In contemporary planning, especially following Pothukuchi & Kaufman's (2000) article highlighting the lack of consideration of food systems in planning, food systems are becoming more relevant both in practice and in research; this is shown in the American Planning Association Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Systems (2007). This guide provides eight reasons food systems planning should be integrated into broader planning practices including the prominence of food related land uses, and the growing inequities of food access in urban and rural areas (APA, 2007). It has also been shown, however, that despite efforts to bring food systems into modern planning,

looking at certain initiatives such as urban agriculture alone misses the broader benefits we could see if we integrate planning for food in the urban, rural, and rural-urban fringe (Sonnino, 2010).

Seeing as there are potential benefits to integrating food systems planning in not only the urban but the rural and rural-urban fringe as well, it will be useful to understand further the value of the rural-urban fringe as agricultural and non-agricultural. A review of the literature here will also highlight the importance of Austin's rural-urban fringe to the creation of what the City of Austin/Travis County have called a sustainable food system.

RURAL-URBAN FRINGE

Parham (2015) notes that the urban periphery is where a great deal of specialized crops are grown that aren't necessarily viable for more monoculture operations. Because of this unique role that the rural-urban fringe plays in food production, it will be important to understand how we can preserve the space and boost its interaction with the urban and the rural. Natural and urban spaces have both been shown to benefit from the justification of the rural-urban fringe as unique (Parham, 2015). This relates not only to the land, which has ecological and agricultural benefits, but also to the people that are operating out of this space (i.e., farmers/farmworkers), who see the benefits of urban and rural knowledge/resources (Parham, 2015; Mayer, Habersetzer, & Meili, 2016). It is

particularly important to note these benefits and the linkages between the urban and rural-urban fringe, as Pothukuchi and Kaufman's (2000) research showed that in their survey of 22 planning agencies, one of the common justifications for not dealing with food systems as planners was that they weren't an urban issue. Parham (2015) shows also that food systems planning ties into theories of environmental planning, presenting the rural-urban fringe as an independent space from both the urban and rural. If we are to begin connecting the urban and rural food spaces, it is important then to pay special attention to the rural-urban fringe as its own entity. This is supported by Brinkley (2018) as well, who claims that "...evidence-based theory suggests that the periphery plays an important, if indirect, role in population growth and urban vitality" (148). Brinkley (2018) calls for a new framework for understanding the formation of the rural-urban fringe but, nonetheless, points to the need to strengthen the viability of these spaces. As this relates specifically to Austin, we see also that the lands that reside within the rural-urban fringe (roughly 20 miles wide) to the east hold a large amount of prime agricultural soils (Simon, 2008). In light of this, understanding the planning requirements for agricultural lands is necessary. The American Planning Association (1999) issued a guide for the preservation of agricultural land with the intention of it being used to address the issue of "...urban development on good agricultural land that could be accommodated on less productive land…". The Policy Guide goes on to highlight the benefits of preserving agricultural land outside of just production but also open space and habitat (APA, 1999). This aligns with the literature reviewed above, which posited that rural-urban fringe

space can act as beneficial not only to the urban but also to the natural (Parham, 2015; Mayer, Habersetzer, & Meili, 2016). Because Travis County has much of its prime agricultural soil in Austin's east rural-urban fringe zone, these policy guides and recommendations for how growth should be handled in that space are paramount to Austin/Travis County creating the sustainable food system they have set as their goal. There are various theories of what growth should look like in these types of spaces though. As we see in more traditional land use plan patterns such as Howard's (1989) Garden City and in Duany & Talen's (2002) transect planning, concentric rings of development led to lower density uses at the fringe where agricultural uses might reside. Brinkley (2018) has challenged this pattern by suggesting a type of development pattern that follows concepts of rugosity in the field of ecology. In this model, urban land uses might extend within controlled zones, out into the rural-urban fringe to offer the benefits of urban access to fringe and rural residents (i.e. farmers/farmworkers) and to ensure that land value benefits are received without threatening the existence of say, preserved agricultural lands (Brinkley, 2018). As part of the current study we need to also understand how food system stakeholders/actors in these areas (i.e. farmers/farmworkers) are interpreting the efforts put forth thus far by urban stakeholders (i.e. city/county officials) to create an equitable food system in the face of prospective growth into these rural-urban fringe zones. Next, I begin to look at such efforts in Austin/Travis County, as Austin is both growing quickly into its hinterland and has put forth some effort to create a sustainable food system.

FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING IN AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY

According to City of Austin Food Policy Board recommendations, there have been multiple attempts at creating a more sustainable food system in Austin/Travis County. For instance, the 2014 recommendation 20141013-4C4 from the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends policies be put in place to preserve Austin's food shed. Such recommendations mirror the sentiments of broader documents from the City of Austin such as the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (2012) and the State of the Food System Report put out by the Office of Sustainability in 2015. In these documents the city sets goals for itself such as supporting the local production and consumption of food, increased access to healthy foods, and increased public private partnerships to facilitate an equitable food system (Imagine Austin, 2012; City of Austin, 2015). But, as Bidiuc (2015) points out in her recommendation of a food system plan for Austin, there isn't really anything in place to keep Austin/Travis County on track for meeting their own goals. This is met with the added problem, however: of a lack of integration of farmer/farmworker input into what the most helpful ways to achieve these broad goals might be, and furthermore, which ones might be most important. Weissman & Potteiger (2018) use the case of the Central New York food system to highlight the benefits of including diverse stakeholder input in the food system planning process. In this study they point to the importance not only of the inclusion of a diverse set of stakeholders (including producers) but also utilize an assets-based approach which points

to the assets that a food system can build off to achieve their goals (Weissman & Potteiger, 2018). I believe Austin/Travis County has achieved the latter in their State of the Food System Report (2015) but as I argue here, they could learn from this case study by including a more diverse set of stakeholders in their food systems planning process.

CONCLUSION

These studies have provided an evolving framework for understanding food systems planning. From historical contextualization of the relationship between food/agriculture and cities to the planning specific recommendations of the APA guides, one is able to grasp the evolution and creation of what *good* food systems planning might look like. From this I am able to show what the City of Austin and Travis County are successfully accomplishing, and where they still have yet to go. Specifically this is shown in their lack of consideration of input from farmers/farmworkers throughout their food system process. Without this consideration of the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders, as seen in Weissman & Potteiger (2018), the City of Austin/Travis County will be unable to create the sustainable food system that they set as a goal for themselves. This is important because, as the literature here has shown, food systems can be linked to many of the sub-disciplines of planning and affect the quality of planning outcomes generally for a city/region.

There has been less work supporting the rural-urban fringe as an important, independent space to the urban and rural processes that affect and are affected by it. As

we have seen here, the ideal way to theorize the formation of these spaces is beginning to be reimagined, where Brinkley (2018) challenges the traditional concentric model exemplified in work by Howard (1989) and Duany & Talen (2002) and presents instead, a model based on theories of rugosity from the field of ecology. Generally, the works presented here represent a niche within the broader planning discipline. But hopefully, as I show here and argue for in the attached study, this body of literature represents the beginning of the creation of an important, formal branch of urban and regional planning.

Chapter 5: Interviews

I started this study with several assumptions about what I might find. I first hypothesized that there was minimal connection between food policy makers in Austin/Travis County and farmers in the same space. In my brief interactions with food policy I have noticed a lack of farmer involvement; similarly, in my more extensive experience with farms in Travis County, I noticed a lack of governmental outreach except to enforce food safety and production standards. To test these assumptions I talked with as many farmers and food policy stakeholders as possible. This not only gave me information on the perceived connection of farmers to formal food systems planning in A/TC, it provided me with comparative data on the two main variables in my research, farmer input in food systems planning and policy commitments to including farmers in food systems planning. What follows is an account and analysis of what I found in interviews with farmers in Austin and eastern Travis County as well as food policy-related stakeholders.

Interviews with farmers shed light on my own assumptions in this research and offered new and useful perspectives. Later in the chapter I will discuss directly, the role of farmers in food systems planning through various lenses brought to light during my time talking with Austin and Travis County area farmers.

Generally, cost was discussed as a major barrier to the viability of farming in Travis County moving forward, but not as I had previously understood it. Prior to interviews, when thinking of cost-related exclusions, land costs were the principal

concern; this is true in the efforts by A/TC officials as well, though it is usually found under the umbrella term of *farmland access*. Cost exclusions are felt by farmers and farmworkers in a variety of ways. Increasing cost of living in Austin keeps farmworkers from being able to live in the city they grow food for, effectively pushing them away from the benefits of urban amenity access. This was a theme that came up in nearly every farmer interview that was conducted.

Interviews showed that the work that governmental bodies, such as the Austin Travis County Food Policy Board, are putting their time and money into align with a major part of what farmers find important and want to see more of: Outreach and Access. Farmers/farmworkers in A/TC are proud of the work they do and happy to boast about the number of people they are helping to feed. When asked how they would improve the A/TC food system, there was a strong consensus that what would make it even better is an increase in food access. In my analysis of ATCFPB meeting minutes I noted that there is a strong effort to address consumer-side inequities in the A/TC food system, namely food access (inaccess). It appears that this is something that farmers care about as well, not only because they feel it is part of their job to make sure as many communities as possible have access to healthy food, but because the more people that have access to their food, the more farmers can expand their markets. It was also pointed out, however, that this is not something that farmers can do themselves without incurring great costs. They called for city support in healthy and local food market expansion so that producers and consumers would benefit. This is evidence that collaboration with farmers could be

beneficial in creating a more equitable food system in Austin. If city/county officials were to reach out to farmers, efforts to expand existing and create new markets could benefit greatly. Farmers and city/county officials have similar goals and this should be capitalized on for the benefit of the food system generally.

There has been outreach to farmers by city/county officials for data gathering on policy recommendations and to inform specific studies (Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub), yet farmers interviewed for this study (some of which are known to be involved in certain city research) still report a lack of face-to-face interactions with these officials. Multiple interviewees pointed out the problem that both local governmental officials and farmers face, a lack of time and resources. The wording was something along the lines of: "the City (of Austin) doesn't have the time or resources to reach out at the level they need to at this point" and "farmers are so busy they only have time to worry about what is going on in their fields". Despite any criticism city officials might receive for not reaching out as much as necessary, there is certainly an understanding by farmers that they lack the resources to actually do that. The question of how to allocate more resources to farmer outreach might be a good starting point if we hope to address this problem.

From these interviews it seems that the majority of the understanding of what progress is being made in food systems advancement is the result of work completed by organizations such as the Central Texas Young Farmer Coalition and the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association alongside and with support from national grassroots

organizations. What we are seeing in the way of food systems planning involving farmers now is largely led by grassroots organizations and institutional organizations such as the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, which operate at the state and regional levels. Farmers, too, describe themselves in terms that build a narrative of self-motivated community leaders operating separate from city and county efforts. It would be beneficial for local officials to look into the creation of a local farmer forum, that acts as an informal organizational tool for Austin/Travis County farmers, and also provides a space for those farmers to air their concerns, discuss their ideas, and create novel solutions to food systems problems along with food policy officials. These forums could act as an extension of the connections that farmers make at farmers' markets, one of the only spaces identified by interviewees as being a central meeting point for local farmers.

In describing their own farming situation, one farmer stated that some "...can't believe we've been so lucky". I think this applies to the current state of food systems relationships as well. We are lucky that the goals of farmers in the region and governmental officials have been somewhat in sync, otherwise there would be contradictory efforts being made that would eventually clash with one another and what would result would presumably be to the detriment of both. That being said, farmers did report that city officials certainly haven't kept them from accomplishing anything. They have been there when called on, but don't have a very strong presence otherwise.

City and county-level organizations have consulted national and state organizations on policy happenings and other food system trends that need to be

addressed. A reasonable next step in outreach would be consultation with more regional and local organizations such as those listed above in a capacity more frequent than partnership on reports and research. Stated another way, ongoing communication with these organizations should be pursued and from that will come an increase in collaboration with area farmers.

Farmers reported that they see a need for more policy makers and advocates with a farming background, though there are individuals working in policy and planning that fit that description. There seems to be an understanding that farmers have a very different way of understanding needs on a day-to-day scale while decision makers are operating with more abstract knowledge. One might liken this to the benefits of using local and scientific forms of knowledge in other research scenarios.

Throughout interviews there was a consistent theme identifying the role of farm scale in successful food systems operations. Farmers recognize that farms at different scales have different responsibilities in the same system, where urban farms may take on the role of educator as they are located in close proximity to a dense population. The frequent exposure of citizens to this type of land use, farmers argued, would help set a precedent for agricultural activities occurring in urban spaces, acting in multiple occupations, be in community engagement, educational programs, or (and especially) food production. Larger farms on the other hand should shoulder more of the regulatory burdens and provide food at a much larger scale, with a larger impact on the local economy. These farms can also set the example for smaller farms looking to up-scale

their operations. The Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub (2018) showed that this was something that many smaller farms were interested in doing; putting large and small scales in contact through a food hub with access to regulatory resources (especially around food safety) would be a great way to benefit from this informal social structure of area farms.

The need for more farmland preservation should not be discounted here. It seems that this is another area that everyone involved in the A/TC food system is aware of. Farmers know it is threatening their viability as businesses, and in an urban setting there is an understanding that farms will go out of business. This may be from owner/operator retirement, but if those lands are not connected to up and coming farmers, they are at a much greater risk of being lost to development. As far as is understood in this study, the only thing farmers can do to preserve their land is to continue farming it or ensure someone else takes over the farming of it. To date, city/county officials seem to be making a good deal of progress in securing (buying) lands throughout Travis County to be used as farmland. There are also initiatives being undertaken by multiple organizations and farms such as FarmShare Austin to connect young farmers to available land, and the Farmland Access working group with the ATCFPB has been doing good work here as well. Of particular importance in farmland preservation in Travis County is the urban-rural fringe, where contiguous farmland is under immediate threat of being lost. It is important that we understand, this space is unique in food systems planning as it provides an interface between the rural and urban, and offers a particular land use mix that can

benefit local production and distribution of food (Parham, 2015). This means that efforts to preserve farmland should also look at the long-term realities of urban resource access and prioritize those farmlands with projected amenity connections (i.e. water, transportation, healthcare services).

Part of developing food systems planning is working food back into the urban narrative. This means community education on local food production, and an understanding of how food is distributed throughout a region. City/County officials alongside non-profits such as the SFC have been working on this, but farmers still pointed to the need for an increase in awareness (which necessitates education) of how local food is produced. As mentioned previously this is one of the benefits of protecting urban agriculture, keeping a portion of production in close proximity to urban residents. Education for "up and coming farmers" (multiple farmers used this term to describe those interested in farming but not necessarily working toward it directly) was important to farmers as well. They saw this as a way to ensure greater farmland protection as the more educated farmers we have in our county, the more successful farming operations might be and the less time it might take to turn a farm over to the next generation of farmers while keeping it successfully producing.

The goal of these interviews was to gain insight into what the role of farmers in Austin/Travis County food systems planning is. This means what their role currently is and what their role can/should be in the future. I approached this subject with the assumption that food systems planning was being done only at a governmental level in

Austin and Travis County. By identifying the perceptions of farmers and policy stakeholders I have, hopefully, presented a clearer narrative of how food systems planning is understood here. It is clear to me now that food systems planning is occurring at several different scales simultaneously. There are a number of grassroots organizations bringing farmers together in a common forum on a state scale, there are informal planning initiatives being undertaken by individual farms in the form of community building and food network logistics and improvement, and there are efforts by city/county officials creating programs and acquiring funding to support those programs. What we need now is a cohesive framework for interaction in and between those levels of action.

Chapter 6: Case Studies

American Planning Association (APA) guides on food systems planning practices and farmland preservation list many options for supporting local farmers through planning. Research for these guides was exclusively secondary, but one might assume that the primary research that the guides pull from incorporate data gathered directly from farmers. What has happened, it seems, is that Austin/Travis County officials have consulted these guidelines and followed several of the recommended strategies. But, because there are no strategies in the broadest and most formal guidelines available for food systems planning that include talking with local farmers to gain context, they can't really be blamed for overlooking its importance. Looking at more specialized groups affiliated with the APA such as the APA Food Interest Group (APA-FIG), the role of community engagement becomes more explicit:

> [T]he active, meaningful engagement of all stakeholders including governmental, community groups (non-governmental stakeholders, including a diverse range of cultures, and marginalized groups) and allied professionals (food policy councils or similar entities; public health, economic development, etc.) in food systems planning and policy making processes and decisions…
>
> (APA-FIG, 2019)

When one digs deeper into the organizations involved in 'good' food systems planning happening in the U.S. there are noticeably different interpretations of this first aspect of

food systems planning. Growing Food Connections (GFC), in partnership with the APA, and working to "...enhance community food security while ensuring sustainable and economically viable agriculture and food production" interprets the above block quote as the following: "Meaningful engagement in planning and policy making processes and decisions of all community stakeholders from farmers and residents to government representatives, civic organizations, food systems advocates, and allied professionals…" (GFC, 2017). The Michigan State University Extension at the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources offers their understanding as well:

> At its best, food systems planning is rooted in the collaborative partnership between the food system community, which includes farmers, retailers, consumers and local government officials. Through the food systems planning process, local and regional governments develop and implement policies to influence and shape how food is produced, processed, distributed, consumed and disposed. These policies provide direction and guidance on how to address opportunities and challenges faced by the community's food system.
>
> (Wills, 2017)

However far removed these interpretations are only exemplifies the need for a more consistent and detailed understanding of the role of farmers in food systems planning. In this chapter, I aim to exemplify the importance of farmer involvement in

food systems planning by providing snapshots of planning initiatives undertaken across the U.S. that involve a level of direct farmer contact higher than that of Austin/Travis County governmental officials have undertaken.

I have identified these scenarios through research and references found in peer-reviewed research and in food systems organizations' web databases. In selecting the these planning scenarios, my unit of measurement for farmer input was simply the amount of times farmer interactions were mentioned, whether in meetings held, interviews conducted, or farmers directly involved in plan development as part of a team. To gain a variety of scale I looked at food systems planning initiatives and documents city and regional levels. I found that city-level plans tend to focus significantly more on urban agriculture than agriculture in the urban-rural fringe or in surrounding rural areas. As seen in existing literature, the value of the urban-rural fringe is substantial and complex (Parham, 2015). Cities like Seattle, Washington have codified farmland preservation at the county and regional scale in their Local Food Action Initiative (resolution number: 31019) (Seattle City Council, 2008). This is similar to recommendations that the ATCFPB have made to preserve farmland, but still leaves a gap between urban and rural farmland protection that should be addressed. There are four planning initiatives that stood out in their inclusion of farmers that I will discuss here. The first is the *King County Farms and Food Roundtable*; the second initiative is a regional food system planning program for Onondaga County in New York, *FoodPlanCNY*; the third is a food system plan from the Delaware Valley Regional

Planning Commission for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania *Eat Local Montco*; the final plan is the *Chautauqua County Farmland Protection Plan* out of New York. These planning initiatives have reported their methods, identifying stakeholders by name or at least by profession. They have also created a space for diverse stakeholder groups to engage consistently throughout the planning process.

KING COUNTY FARMS AND FOOD ROUNDTABLE

The *King County Farms and Food Roundtable* (KCFFR), started by King County, the City of Seattle, and the Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority, brought together thirty five food systems stakeholders from different disciplines; this included farmers market stakeholders, university extension stakeholders, national and state agricultural organizations, and (most relevant for this study) farmers (KCFFR, 2014). These stakeholders were brought in to work with eight government officials from the founding entities with the express goals to:

> Identify options and make recommendations to the sponsoring agencies for strategies, both near-term and long-term, to preserve additional farmland in King County [...and…] Identify options and make recommendations for near-term and long-term strategies to increase market and distribution opportunities for local small and mid-sized farmers in King County, looking particularly at food hubs or

other means of aggregating local product to expand access to markets.

(KCFFR, 2014, 1)

This is similar to the goals of the Sustainable Food Center's feasibility study for a Central Texas food hub. The KCFFR goals do differ in that they leave room for other options in an ongoing process incorporating stakeholder (farmer) input and recommendations along the way. The SFC in Austin rather, saw a possibility for a food hub and produced a single study (a useful study) that judged how realistic a food hub would be here. One hopes that this was the first step toward something more actionable, and with that hope, I provide the KCFFR example as a possible strategy for Austin/Travis County moving toward a more equitable food system.

The amount of detail provided in the final recommendation document of the KCFFR is at the level needed for good food systems planning. Not only does the KCFFR set goals for itself, it provides policy recommendations that follow a stakeholder-established framework, it provides a set of values that each one of the policy recommendations and policy implementations should adhere to, and it provides assigned action steps to follow (see Figure 6.1) (KCFFR, 2014). We saw in the development of the ATCFPB recommendations that hiring of a Food Policy Manager, and their involvement in monthly meetings, that The Board gained more direction, accomplishing and documenting much more than in their first four years. It is reasonable to think that the development of a document that follows the framework set by the KCFFR

recommendations, would streamline the efforts of the ATCFPB and other food systems officials in A/TC. In the food system planning initiative for King County, farmers play a role not only as stakeholder informants but, as planners, actively making decisions for the betterment of their food system based on their practical experience in contextually relevant food production.

Stage of Production	Actions	King County	City of Seattle
Acquire and Steward Land and Capital	• Strengthen the capacity of the County's Farmland Preservation Program to acquire farmland and easements. • Invest in stewardship and management of lands already protected. • Launch a renewed effort to purchase land/development rights to double the amount of protected farmland in 10 years. • Build partnerships with nonprofits to create and expand incubator farms on public land.	• Take the lead and engage Seattle, Pike Place Market, suburban cities and land trusts to implement the farmland preservation measures in this action plan. • Pursue funding options to build staff capacity to acquire land and easements, and provide stewardship of the public assets. • In near term (2-3 years), use proceeds from the City/County Transfer of Development Rights Program, the Conservation Futures Tax, state and federal grants, and philanthropic investment to acquire land and easements. • For longer-term (10 years), plan for bonds, levies or a new funding source that could be in place in 2-3 years. • Make County-owned land available to nonprofit organizations to create incubator farms. • Ensure that the importance of protecting farmland is understood and considered in County processes that may jeopardize farmland (e.g., land use planning, salmon recovery, flood management, etc.) • Any future farmland acquisitions should include operating resources to maintain the program over time.	• Support King County's farmland preservation initiatives through effective management and potential expansion of the City/County Transfer of Development Rights program. • Continue to support the growth of incubator farms on City-owned land (Marra Farm, Red Barn Ranch, and Rainier Beach Urban Farm) and explore other potential sites, including city-owned land, for urban farming. • Consider purchasing a limited amount of farmland and leasing the land to nonprofit organizations for incubator farms. Provide increased access to local healthy food by creating linkages between food grown on public land, and markets and programs that serve low-income consumers. • Support increasing the percentage of Conservation Futures Tax funds used for the preservation of farmland in King County. • Work with King County on the development of future funding strategies for farmland preservation. • Continue to support the growth of the City's P-patch and urban garden programs through the maintenance, acquisition and development of appropriate sites and by providing education about growing food in the city.
Grow/Harvest	• Develop an economic development plan for the local agriculture sector that is as robust as those Seattle and King County have created for other sectors. • Tailor public policies and programs to the unique and varied conditions in each of our county's farming communities.	• Tailor public policies and programs to the unique and varied conditions in each of our county's farming communities. This would include recommendations of The Farm, Flood and Fish Task Force, the Farm-City Roundtable and the King Conservation District. • Review the application of local regulations within each farming community to ensure they are as streamlined and effective as possible.	• Through the Office of Economic Development, work with King County and other stakeholders to create a "sector strategy" for the local food sector, and align economic development policies to advance regional goals for the sector. • Explore opportunities to provide financial support to Seattle-based

Figure 8: Action items assigned by entity and production stage (KCFFR, 2014, A-37)

FOODPLANCNY

Similar to A/TC, Onondaga County's first step to strengthening their food system was the creation of an official governmental policy group; this was the Onondaga County Agriculture Council (Weissman & Potteiger, 2018). Rather than having a goal of

generally creating an equitable food system, the Council's goals were more production oriented:

> The County Executive has tasked the Agriculture Council with helping to ensure that county government is working to promote and preserve Onondaga County's strong farming community … helping to develop strategies and programs to promote local food regionally as well as strengthen and enhance the connections between the County's urban core to rural, agricultural areas … [and to] improve and develop pro-agriculture/farming friendly policies and regulations.
>
> (Weissman & Potteiger, 2018, 1, from Onondaga County Executive, 2012)

This focus on production is not presented here to say that A/TC should not be focusing on equitable access to healthy food; this is an equally important issue and good work is being done in this realm. Rather, it is to illustrate that production and farmers can also be an important point of action in food systems planning.

FoodPlanCNY is an ongoing assessment of the Central New York food system as an extension of the Onondaga County Agriculture Council (Weissman & Potteiger, 2018). This planning initiative points to the importance of asset-based assessments and employing participatory methods in food systems planning (Weissman & Potteiger, 2018). As it relates to the present study, the work done for FoodPlanCNY shows that farmers can in fact have a role in food systems planning other than production. They can

act as invaluable participants in assessing the state of their food system, something that should occur in collaboration with other key stakeholders. Weissman & Potteiger (2018) in an overview of the work done on FoodPlanCNY show that scale has become increasingly relevant for food systems planning, shifting from a local understanding to a more regional understanding of food systems as appropriate. A/TC has conducted ongoing food system assessments of its food system yet their first *State of the Food System* report in 2015 had a decidedly urban focus, noting a few county-level census data, but producing a more substantial community-engaged report on the urban food environment. The 2018 update on the *State of the Food System* report is an update, consistent with the city scale of its 2015 predecessor. These reports were completed by the City of Austin so this scale is understandable, but still needs to be complemented by a larger, regional or county-level assessment.

EAT LOCAL MONTCO

This initiative acts as an addendum to a comprehensive plan for the same region; it acts here as an example of how a food system plan (self-described as a strategy) can incorporate farmer input. Here, diverse stakeholders not only helped to create an assessment of the Montgomery County food system; their input helped to form the recommendations the plan put forth. Many of these recommendations are similar to those made by the ATCFPB, focusing on local food purchasing, farm to institution programs, farmers markets, etc. As observed in previous chapters, these recommendations in A/TC weren't necessarily linked to farmer input directly, though there were meetings held with broad community input, stakeholder inventories were never taken. Eat Local Montco (2018) not only provides an inventory of their stakeholders and coverage of how their input was utilized, it recommends initiatives to help "convene food system stakeholders" so that information sharing and problem solving can have more meaningful direction (37). Farmer interviews conducted for the present study showed the difficulty in bringing together farmers and government officials to plan or even share ideas. It was observed that both parties are incredibly busy and lack the time or resources to commit to searching out those interactions. Eat Local Montco shows us that these interactions are viable and valuable not only for plan formation but also for continued monitoring, evaluation, and amendment of food system plans (initiatives).

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN (CCFPP)

This food system plan offers a slightly earlier perspective on food systems planning. Being adopted in 2000, this plan predates the APA's 2007 *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning* but does coincide with their 1999 *Policy Guide on Agricultural Land Preservation*. Even though this plan focuses primarily on farmland protection, its critical consideration of food system stakeholders is commendable and relevant to more comprehensive food systems planning. I want to draw attention specifically to the manner in which farmers are framed in this plan. Rather than being considered the 'ultimate stakeholder group' (which I am not arguing for here) they are deliberately placed, again, in a diverse set of stakeholders that work in "partnerships" (CCFPP, 2000). In developing a planning process, the first step is as follows: "Develop a process that includes the community, most importantly the agricultural community" (CCFPP, 2000, 18). The plan is specific in its requirement of a specific stakeholder group, but qualifies this shortly after stating:

> The first step was to include all of the interested parties. While farmers may feel the effects of residential / commercial growth they are not the only ones in the community. It takes partnerships, not just farmers, to be able to address and solve the problems associated with growth.
>
> (CCFPP, 2000, 18)

These words, again, should guide all forms of food systems planning. The food system is diverse, involving many processes, and stakeholders. As the APA has pointed out, food systems are involved in at least, land use planning, economic development, transportation, and environmental planning (APA, 2007). For being developed nearly two decades ago before food systems planning had gained considerably more recognition in planning theory and practice, this plan set a great example for the role of farmers in food systems planning.

CONCLUSION

The four initiatives highlighted above show that there is a definite role for farmers in food systems planning and that there are benefits to this. Why, then, is it so hard to find examples of defined stakeholder input in food systems plans? These four initiatives are part of a growing body of work in practice and in theory and yet they were some of the only planning initiatives discovered that monitored and documented their stakeholder involvement. Perhaps there is a need for more evaluation and reflection in food systems planning. Maybe all food system plans, including work that Austin and Travis County have done, are full of valuable farmer input that has simply been folded into works as planners' and policy makers' recommendations. This should be explored further in future food systems planning research. Regardless, at this point, the number of transparent food systems plans in the U.S. is lacking. But, from what we can see in the guidelines and

understandings of food systems planners and planning organizations throughout the U.S., engagement with all stakeholders, including farmers, is of great importance.

In this chapter I have covered planning initiatives that provide good examples of the role of farmer in food systems planning in practice. This was coupled with a comparison to the role of farmers in current food system planning in A/TC to offer points of growth in planning for and with diverse stakeholder groups. The next chapter will compile observations and recommendations from interview analyses and case study analyses and direct them at work being carried out in Austin and Travis County today.

Chapter 7 - Recommendations

The role of farmers in food systems planning has been presented through three separate lenses: the role of farmers in A/TC food systems planning practice, the potential role of farmers in food systems planning in A/TC, and the perceived role of farmers in food systems planning in A/TC. The data compiled on these roles from interviews and case study analyses has been narrowed to produce concise recommendations and will be presented here as ways for A/TC officials to move toward creating a more equitable food system.

ONGOING INCLUSION

We saw in the food systems planning initiatives covered in the previous chapter that farmers can act in a multitude of ways to inform food systems planning (KCFFR, 2014; Weissman & Potteiger, 2018; Eat Local Montco, 2018; CCFPP, 2000). Weissman & Potteiger (2018) also cite the Food and Agriculture Organization and the Resource Centers on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (2015, 2016) stating that food systems planning should involve "...a process that includes...ongoing participatory multi-stakeholder dialogue…"(2). Together, this information leads to the recommendation that food systems planning in Austin and Travis County should work more vigilantly to involve farmers and other diverse food systems stakeholders in the planning process not only as one-time informants, but as continuing participants in the planning process. As

noted previously too, farmers are already acting as informal food systems planners, boosting community building capacities, fleshing out transportation networks, and providing nutritional support to those in need. So, why not involve them, and others, in the formal planning process to gain consistency and direction for actionable change? Again, following principles of communicative planning, good planning should involve many and diverse perspectives in problem identification and solution (Elling, 2017). It will also be important in working toward more substantial inclusion of farmers, to allocate more resources to stakeholder outreach. Government officials and farmers alike are consistently busy, allocation will need to be deliberate and secure.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Part of ensuring this inclusion is an increase in monitoring and evaluation of food systems planning initiatives. Monitoring and evaluation of results is already being carried out through annual reports produced by the ATCFPB and through recurring *State of the Food System* reports. But, what is not being done to the same degree is the evaluation and reporting of processes and methodologies. Seasons (2003) shows that planning needs monitoring and evaluation to ensure the best possible results, where as many alternatives are known as possible so that an informed decision can be made and where success/failure can be accurately measured for change or consistency. Including farmers in more continuous food systems planning could increase the number of alternatives

considered to reach an end. Furthermore, practicing farmers could provide real-time, evaluative feedback so that appropriate changes can be made quickly and efficiently within the formal planning/policy structure.

AMENITY ACCESS

Brinkley (2018) worked to establish a framework for creating more equitable access to urban amenities by residents in the rural-urban fringe. In 2017 Austin maintained one of the lowest cost of living indices compared to other major business centers across the U.S. (Austin Chamber, 2019). Yet, farmers and farm laborers are still being driven out of the city due to the increases in cost of living, pushing them away from the amenities that the city has to offer. In working toward farmland protection in Travis County (which was defined here as the constitution of the rural-urban fringe) officials must consider how access to urban amenities will change in the coming years and take steps toward novel solutions to benefit not only farmers, but residents looking for more affordable living options in the rural-urban fringe.

FARMER FORUM

Though there is good work being done to bring farmers together at a regional, state, and national level by private and non-profit organizations, having a more localized (county-

level) platform and/or meeting space for farmers to convene and discuss what they need in order to grow/sustain their business would be beneficial. We saw that in 2013 there was an informal organization at the hyper-local-level of urban farms in Austin to advocate for and achieve goals that would benefit the four farms specifically (Austin Urban Farms, 2013). Something similar but scaled up could be useful to achieve county-level goals because of the difficulty of organizing across governmental boundaries generally in planning, and because agriculture in Travis County (rural-urban fringe) is unique in the challenges it will face now and in the coming years. This might be something that could be carried out by the AgriLife Extension office in Travis County, though interviews showed that their current accessibility is lacking.

BOOST INTERORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

There are clear relationships in place currently between city/county officials and private/non-profit farmer advocacy organizations. I believe, through data gathered in interviews and gleaned from the efforts by these various groups, that an increase in communications would help create more change in food systems planning in A/TC. Similar to the pooling of resources that will benefit farmers with the creation of a Central Texas Food Hub, the pooling of resources (knowledge and funding) of multiple organizations working toward similar goals will strengthen the viability of food systems planning as it grows into a more recognized planning sub-discipline.

EDUCATION

The need for an increase in many types of education was presented in interviews. This education increase generally worked toward securing the viability of farming in A/TC but the means to this end varied. The first level of education increase needed as identified by stakeholders is the education of up-and-coming farmers and farmworkers. Farms need skilled and knowledgeable laborers to be able to operate effectively; data collected for the *Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub* showed similar findings (SFC, 2018). Increasing education of up-and-coming farmers will ensure the smooth transition of farm ownership and operation that will be necessary as farmer age continues to increases as well. The second level of education needed is within large institutions acting within the food system as stakeholders and decision makers. Farmers interviewed feel that there is great potential for the expansion of their consumer base if larger institutions such as the local and county governments were to increase awareness and marketing of local food purchasing within their own organizational structure. The last level of education is education by means of exposure. This is generally more applicable to the role of urban farms in the A/TC food system. Increasing the exposure of the general public to responsible and healthy food production through the preservation and bolstering of farms near high concentrations of the county's population would help to shape a narrative that

is explicit in its inclusion of farming as part of the community dynamic of A/TC which in turn would strengthen the long-term viability of farming.

CONSIDERATION OF SCALE

The consideration of farm scale might not be the first thing to come to mind in creating an equitable food system. But, after a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the A/TC food system, we see that scale might provide a novel way of organizing what the current food system has to offer. Interviews showed that farmers already understand that roles differ depending on the size and scope of their operations. This was highlighted in previous chapters, noting that smaller urban farms have more chance at providing adequate educational value to the large population that resides within the Austin city limits; conversely, farms with more land and higher production numbers can act as role models for smaller farms looking to scale up, testing alternatives in real time and providing information on best practices. New and smaller rural farms can be the focus of efforts to provide support to those outside the urban area, and in the path of growth. This type of consideration will lend itself to increased organization and actionability, which can be difficult to obtain with problems as complex as food system equity.

CONCLUSION

What is the role of farmers in food systems planning? Answering this research question requires multiple approaches. In previous chapters I provided analyses showcasing the current role of farmers in A/TC food system planning, the perceived role of farmers in A/TC food system planning, and the potential role of farmers in A/TC food system planning. The seven recommendations provided above offer an approach that looks at how farmers should be considered in A/TC food system planning. This concludes the direct analysis of data collected for this study. The following chapter will present a summary of findings and framing of the work, and offer final thoughts on food systems planning in Austin and Travis County.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The role of farmers in food systems planning can now be understood both as planner and informant. In both cases, there is a need for ongoing inclusion not only in problem solving but also in problem identification. Because Austin continues to grow into its rural-urban fringe it is particularly important that food systems planning not only continue but also, be refined to address appropriate issues with actionable initiatives. This means working toward an understanding of an equitable food system where, as Raja, Morgan, & Hall (2017) point out, "...planners'...engagement with the food system...propel[s] cities and regions towards conditions where the marginalized lead fuller, richer lives, not only as beneficiaries of a better food system but as those who articulate its problems and define its solutions" (309).

This research was started with the assumption that A/TC has had little to no interaction with farmers in their food systems planning initiatives. After analysis of available documents, and especially those produced in the past year, it was clear that this initial assumption was not true; however, there is significant room for improvement. After interviewing food system stakeholders I found that while there is good-hearted support from the city/county and that the consultation of farmers is being considered more seriously in food systems planning, farmers generally don't see much direct interaction with city/county officials and are hoping for more in the future. The analysis of food systems planning initiatives with exemplary incorporation of farms provided an

example of how A/TC initiatives can improve and how they can benefit from these improvements.

These analyses were used to develop a list of seven recommendations, answering the question: How should farmers be considered in Austin/Travis County food systems planning?

1. The ongoing inclusion of farmers in food systems planning.
2. An increase in monitoring and evaluation in food systems plans.
3. An increase in the consideration of amenity access as a means to a more comprehensive understanding of farmland preservation.
4. The creation of a county-level farmer forum for farmers that air their concerns and discuss ongoing problem solutions.
5. A boost in inter-organizational communications to encourage broad solution alternatives.
6. An increase in agricultural education at multiple levels: public, prospective farmers, and practicing farmers.
7. Consideration of farm scale in the understanding of the role of general farm types.

Austin and Travis County have a history of agriculture that has evolved into the beginnings of formal food systems planning. But, if they hope to begin to approach any understanding of what they define as a *sustainable* food system or what has been defined

here as an *equitable* food system, they will need to consider the role that farmers can play in multiple food systems planning contexts. My goal here is to present a framework for understanding those roles as well as actionable recommendations for established formal food systems planning bodies to embrace in their future initiatives.

Appendix

Map of Study Area

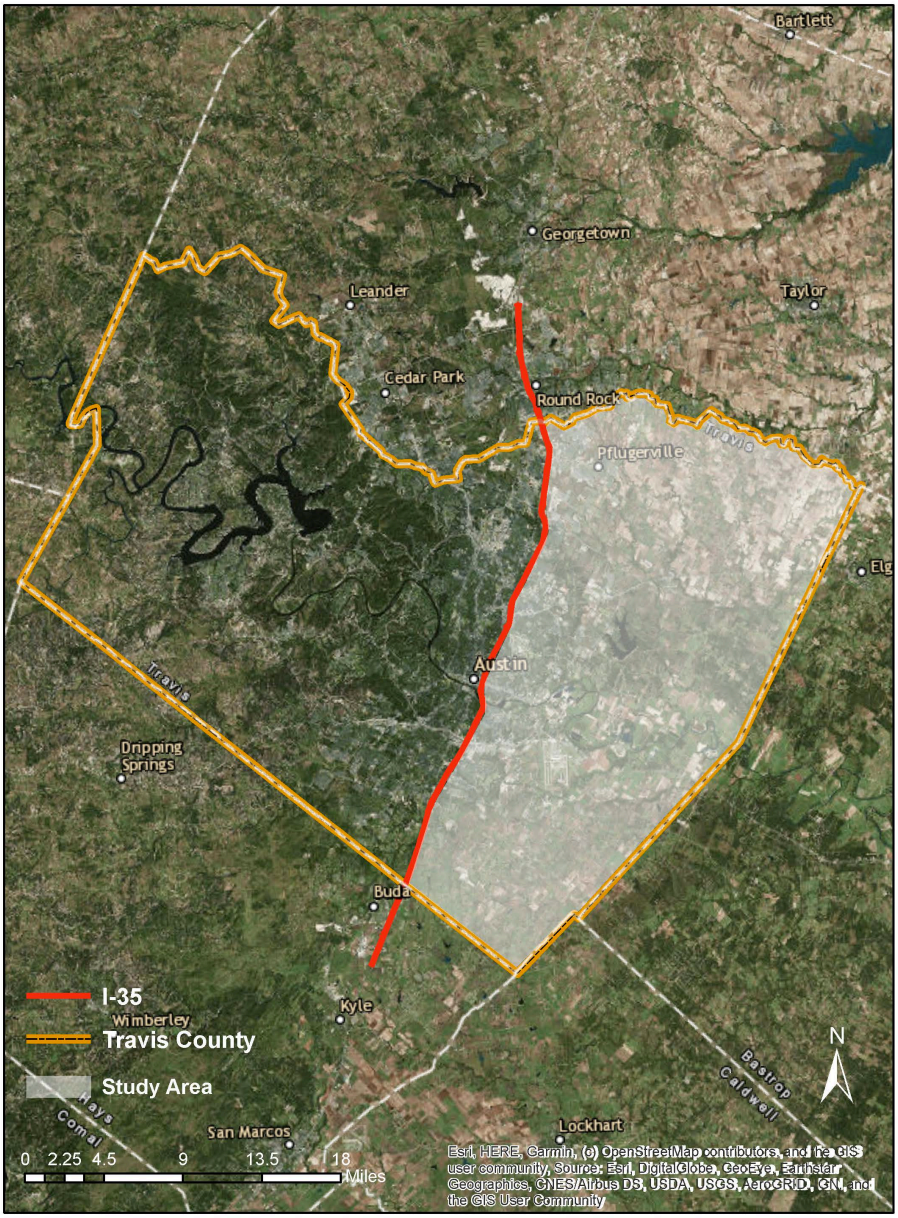

Figure 1: Map of Study Area (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Prime Agriculture Soils

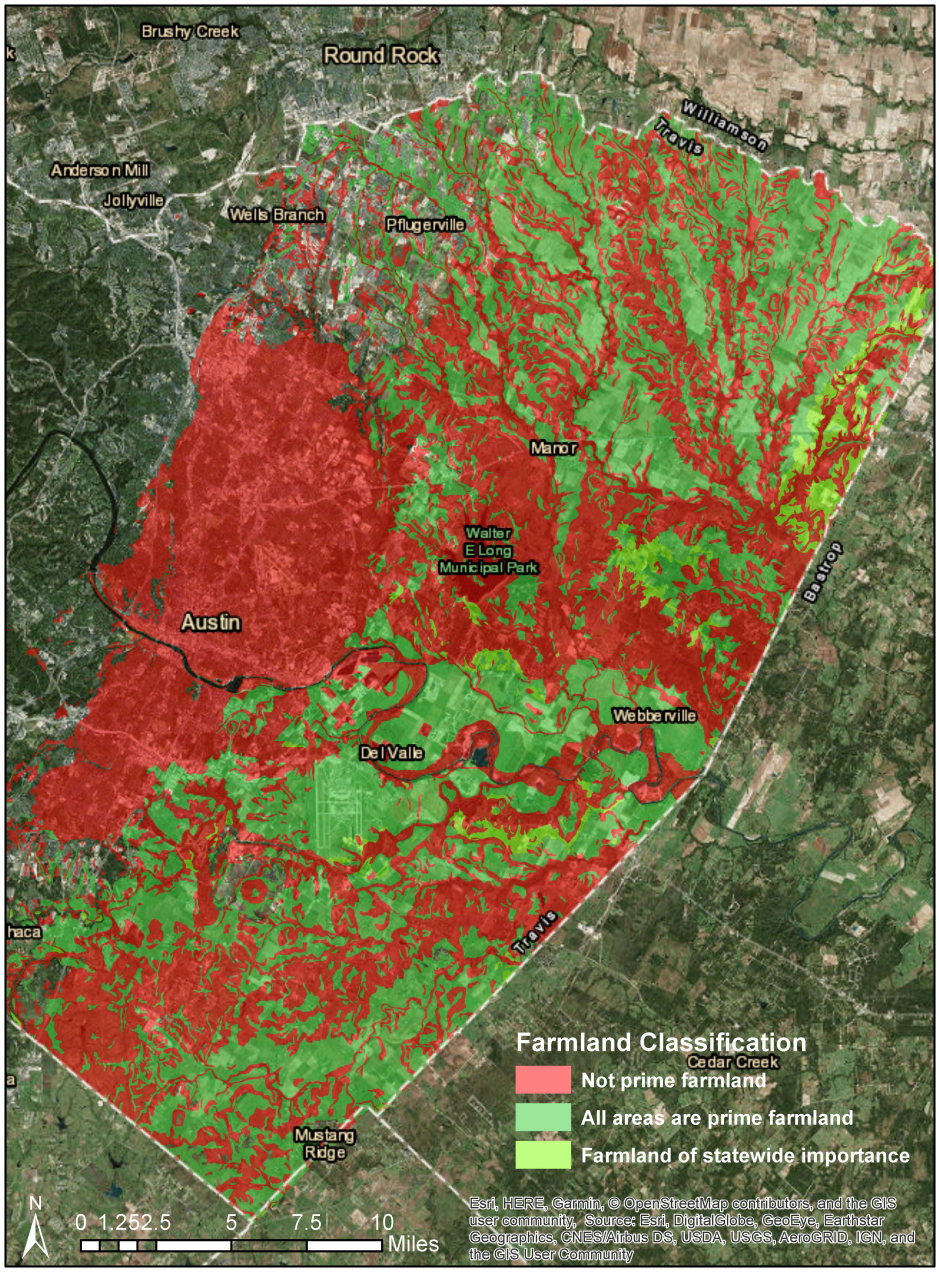

Figure 2: Prime Agriculture Soils in East Travis County (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Prime Agriculture Soils 1987

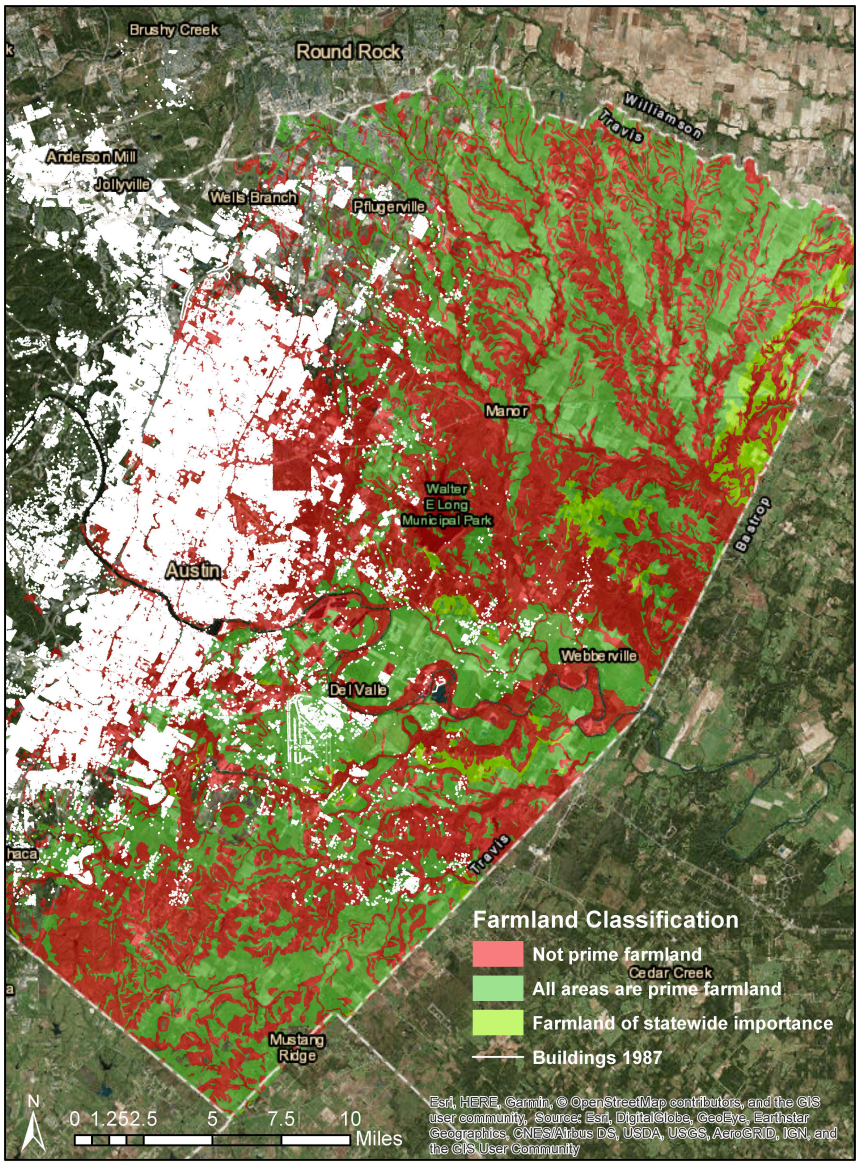

Figure 3: 1987 Building Coverage in Prime Agriculture Soils in East Travis County (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Prime Agriculture Soils 2013

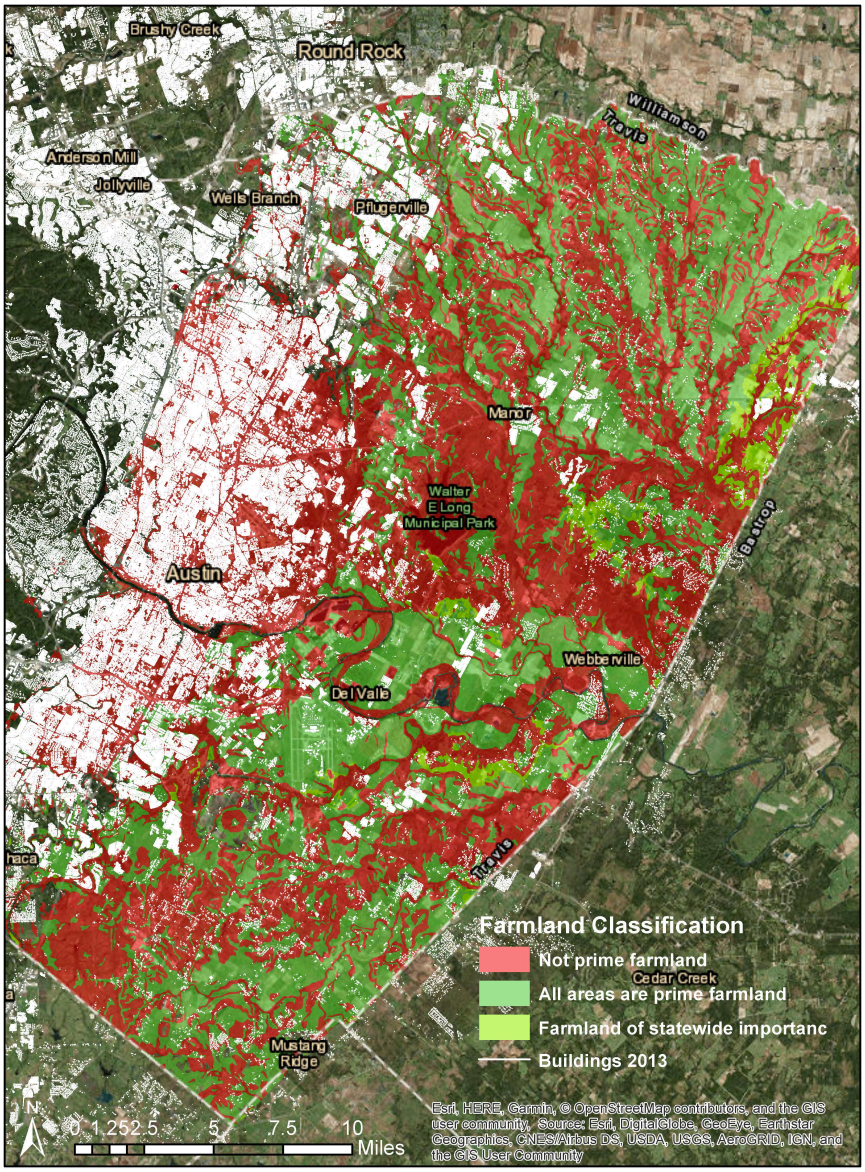

Figure 4: 2013 Building Coverage in Prime Agriculture Soils in East Travis County (N. Taylor Wimberg, 2019)

Figure 5: Map of Original 1839 "Plan of the City of Austin" (L. J. Pilie)

Total Vegetable Farms	2012	351
	2007	307
Total Acres of Harvested Vegetables	2012	21,523
	2007	19,706
Total Acres of Cropland	2012	1,642,163
	2007	2,049,086

Figure 6: State of agriculture in Central Texas (SFC, 2018, 6)

Action	Timeframe
Provide business management & financial consultations for producers.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Build the Elgin Local Food produce processing center.	Near Term (2021-2023)
Matchmaking between producers and market accounts.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Assist producers to become wholesale ready.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Establish micro-aggregation nodes.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Facilitate land access for agricultural producers.	Near Term (2021-2023)
Develop a group purchasing or equipment share for producers.	Near Term (2021-2023)
Assist producers who are interested in transitioning to regenerative agricultural practices.	Near Tem (2021-2023)
Research the potential of a food industry cluster.	Long Term (2023-2028)
Support and outreach for Federal farm programs.	Immediate (2019-2020)
Strengthen farm labor force so producers can hire qualified labor.	Near Term (2021-2023)

Figure 7: Action items from Feasibility Study for a Central Texas Food Hub (SFC, 2018, 2)

Stage of Production	Actions	King County	City of Seattle
Acquire and Steward Land and Capital	• Strengthen the capacity of the County's Farmland Preservation Program to acquire farmland and easements. • Invest in stewardship and management of lands already protected. • Launch a renewed effort to purchase land/development rights to double the amount of protected farmland in 10 years. • Build partnerships with nonprofits to create and expand incubator farms on public land.	• Take the lead and engage Seattle, Pike Place Market, suburban cities and land trusts to implement the farmland preservation measures in this action plan. • Pursue funding options to build staff capacity to acquire land and easements, and provide stewardship of the public assets. • In near term (2-3 years), use proceeds from the City/County Transfer of Development Rights Program, the Conservation Futures Tax, state and federal grants, and philanthropic investment to acquire land and easements. • For longer-term (10 years), plan for bonds, levies or a new funding source that could be in place in 2-3 years. • Make County-owned land available to nonprofit organizations to create incubator farms. • Ensure that the importance of protecting farmland is understood and considered in County processes that may jeopardize farmland (e.g., land use planning, salmon recovery, flood management, etc.) • Any future farmland acquisitions should include operating resources to maintain the program over time.	• Support King County's farmland preservation initiatives through effective management and potential expansion of the City/County Transfer of Development Rights program. • Continue to support the growth of incubator farms on City-owned land (Marra Farm, Red Barn Ranch, and Rainier Beach Urban Farm) and explore other potential sites, including city-owned land, for urban farming. • Consider purchasing a limited amount of farmland and leasing the land to nonprofit organizations for incubator farms. Provide increased access to local healthy food by creating linkages between food grown on public land, and markets and programs that serve low-income consumers. • Support increasing the percentage of Conservation Futures Tax funds used for the preservation of farmland in King County. • Work with King County on the development of future funding strategies for farmland preservation. • Continue to support the growth of the City's P-patch and urban garden programs through the maintenance, acquisition and development of appropriate sites and by providing education about growing food in the city.
Grow/Harvest	• Develop an economic development plan for the local agriculture sector that is as robust as those Seattle and King County have created for other sectors. • Tailor public policies and programs to the unique and varied conditions in each of our county's farming communities.	• Tailor public policies and programs to the unique and varied conditions in each of our county's farming communities. This would include recommendations of The Farm, Flood and Fish Task Force, the Farm-City Roundtable and the King Conservation District. • Review the application of local regulations within each farming community to ensure they are as streamlined and effective as possible.	• Through the Office of Economic Development, work with King County and other stakeholders to create a "sector strategy" for the local food sector, and align economic development policies to advance regional goals for the sector. • Explore opportunities to provide financial support to Seattle-based

Figure 8: Action items assigned by entity and production stage (KCFFR, 2014, A-37)

2009	The Board holds its first meeting, setting goals to gather data and assess the A/TC food system.
2010	The Board works on barriers to farming in urban areas. Rural/county-wide issues seem to be of less concern.
2011	Notable increase in attention given to farmers by The Board. Resources and benchmarks of farmer support begin to move through program recommendations.
2012	Equitable access to healthy food is the key phrase here. Some in-house organization occurs in the form of formalized priorities for The Board.
2013	Increase in farmer participation in meetings during land-use code rewrite. Projects begin to receive funding and long-term goals begin to be met.
2014	Board organization refined as the city's first Food Policy Manager is brought in. Increase in Board collaboration with other local/regional food system organizations.
2015	The Board focuses most of their attention on food access programs. An investigation into available county land for agricultural use is announced in response to farmer concerns.
2016	Good Food Purchasing Program proposed by The Board. Climate change and the role of the food system considered/discussed. Farmland preservation working group narrows focus to urban lands for community gardens.
2017	Ideas on regional food hubs begin to surface. The Board looks deeper into food access issues, establishing subcategories for investigation. Monitoring and plan evaluation begin to be practiced by The Board.
2018	Tangential food systems issues such as affordable housing and paid sick leave addressed. Work done on city/county land access for agricultural uses as well as access to urban amenities on those lands.

Table 1: Summary Table of ATCFPB Meeting Minute Analysis

Endnotes

[1]Data from official January-December 2009 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[2]Data from official January-December 2010 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[3]Data from official January-December 2011 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[4]Data from official January-December 2012 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[5]Data from official January-December 2013 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[6]Data from official January-December 2014 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[7]Data from official January-December 2015 Sustainable Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[8]Data from official January-December 2016 Austin Travis County Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[9]Data from official January-December 2017 Austin Travis County Food Policy Board meeting minutes

[10]Data from official January-December 2018 Austin Travis County Food Policy Board meeting minutes

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